

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA TERRITORIAL DISPUTES: THE CATALYST FOR A  
UNITED STATES-VIETNAMESE SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

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by

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The opinions and conclusions expressed herein are those of the student author and do not necessarily represent the views of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College or any other governmental agency. (References to this study should include the foregoing statement.)

## ABSTRACT

THE SOUTH CHINA SEA TERRITORIAL DISPUTES: THE CATALYST FOR A UNITED STATES-VIETNAMESE SECURITY PARTNERSHIP, by Major Jared Wayne Britz, 165 pages.

As the rebalancing of U.S. power towards the Asia-Pacific occurs, the potential for conflict has increased in the South China Sea (SCS) due to China's assertiveness. In response, the United States has made its intentions clear about its objectives in the region. Vietnam, as the most defiant claimant in the territorial disputes, has actively sought to strengthen its military and security partnerships as a counter-balance to overwhelming Chinese military superiority.

This research examines how the aligned interests of the United States and Vietnam (US-VN) have produced the beginnings of a regional security partnership. The ultimate goal of this research is to discover if the further development of a US-VN partnership aids in achieving U.S. objectives in the SCS. Another goal of this research is to recommend what elements of a security partnership should exist for an optimal and viable US-VN security partnership. In order to identify an optimal option, this research conducted an analysis of China's strategy, which assisted in identifying the risk for each US-VN security partnership option. This research ends with recommended option for a more active and long-term security partnership that prevents Chinese domination of the SCS.

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## ACRONYMS

A2/AD	Anti-Access and Area Denial
ASEAN	Association for Southeast Asian Nations
CN-VN	China and Vietnam
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zone
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
JP	Joint Publication
NDS	National Defense Strategy
NSS	National Security Strategy
PLA	People's Liberation Army
PLAAF	People's Liberation Army Air Force
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PRC	People's Republic of China
QDR	Quadrennial Defense Review
SCS	South China Sea
SLOC	Sea Lines of Communication
SWOT	Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
US-CN	United States and China
US-PH	United States and Philippines
US-VN	United States and Vietnam

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

The rise of Chi na, and of Asia, will over the next decades, bring about a substantial reordering of the international system. The center of gravity of world affairs is shifting from the Atlantic, where it was lodged for the past three centuries, to the Pacific. The most rapidly developing countries are located in Asia, with a growing means to vindicate their perception of the national interest.

—Henry Kissinger, quoted in Randall Doyle,  
*The Roots of War in the 21st Century*

#### Overview

The United States has shifted its focus towards Asia. The reason for the shift is Asia's rapid ascension as one of the centers of power and prestige in the world. This shift in focus is commonly referred to as the "Pivot to Asia."<sup>1</sup> The Obama administration initiated the pivot in 2011, in an effort to rebalance after two decades of primarily focusing on military and diplomatic efforts in the Middle East. The United States is using its strategic partners and allies in Asia to support its adjusted focus and priorities.<sup>2</sup> This rebalance will require increased efforts in diplomatic, information, military, and economic activities in the Asia-Pacific region. Diplomatic efforts hope to boost involvement in regional organizations, such as the East Asian Summit.<sup>3</sup> Militarily, forces

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<sup>1</sup> Mark E. Manyin, Stephen Daggett, Ben Dolven, Susan V. Lawrence, Michael F. Martin, Ronald O'Rourke, and Bruce Vaughn, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Towards Asia* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2012), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Kurt Campbell and Brian Andrew, *Explaining the US 'Pivot' to Asia* (London, England: The Asian Group, The Chatham House, August 2013), 2.

<sup>3</sup> Manyin et al., 1.

and capabilities in Asia would not undergo the reductions other U.S. military forces around the world are facing. In addition, the United States will expand its security cooperation, military exercises, and partnership activities throughout Asia. Economically, the United States will work to expand free trade agreements and strategic economic partnerships in the Asia-Pacific.

One reason for the U.S. shift in attention is China's rise in power and influence.<sup>4</sup> China has become the leading nation in Asia, and with that has come a resolute new assertiveness that has increased the potential for conflict. Historically, a rapid rise in power often leads to military aggression. The Ottoman Empire (1450-1556), Spain (1516-1700), France (1803-1815), Germany (1939-1945), and Japan (1937-1945) are all examples of States that increased rapidly in power and subsequently entered into major conflict.<sup>5</sup> Thus far, China's rise in power has been relatively peaceful, but the dynamics of United States-China (US-CN) relations have captured the attention of politicians, scholars, strategists, and the media.

A cornerstone of China's rise in power has been its rapid economic growth. This economic growth catapulted forward with China's normalization of relations with the United States. President Nixon's 1972 visit to China symbolized this normalization and the beginning of China's rise as a modern world power, but US-CN relations were not fully normalized until 1979. A key figure in enacting economic reform in China was Deng Xiaoping, a statesmen and leader who served in key leadership positions in the

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<sup>4</sup> U.S. President, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, January 2012).

<sup>5</sup> Zhiquan Zhu, *US-China Relations in the 21st Century* (London: Routledge, 2006), 10.

Chinese Communist Party from 1978-1992. Deng used his policy called Four Modernizations, which started China's rapid economic growth, to create an industrialized economy that opened up to global trade and grew rapidly.<sup>6</sup> China's growth in economic power has been a process of opening to the world and deregulation that has evolved over many decades.

Recent economic growth in China has been impressive, although slightly below previous decades. In 2012, China's gross domestic product (GDP) grew 7.7 percent to over eight trillion dollars.<sup>7</sup> At some point in the future, China is expected to surpass the United States as the world's largest economy, although the exact time and by what measure is widely debated. China's recent economic growth has enabled the country to strengthen its other elements of national power.

Militarily, China's publicly disclosed defense budget surpassed \$100 billion dollars for the first time in 2011, making China one of two countries to surpass the \$100 billion dollar mark, the other being the United States.<sup>8</sup> In 2014, China publicly released information showing an increase in defense spending by 12.2 percent from the previous year. Many military analysts speculate that China spends much more than these publicly released figures.<sup>9</sup> Force modernization is a large portion of China's military budget.

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<sup>6</sup> Ezra F. Vogel, *Deng Xiaoping and the Transformation of China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 423.

<sup>7</sup> The World Bank, "China," The World Bank Group, 2014, accessed November 18, 2014, <http://search.worldbank.org/all?qterm=China>.

<sup>8</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," *The Military Balance* 115, no. 1 (February 10, 2015): 217, accessed February 13, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/04597222.2015.996361#.VOQBw3A5CUk>.

<sup>9</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 2013.

China's military continues to strive towards acquiring and integrating foreign technology and building its domestic research and development institutions and infrastructure. Based on its expected continued economic growth, China is predicted to spend nearly 1.3 trillion on defense by the year 2045.<sup>10</sup>

Diplomatically, China has played a more prominent and active role in global affairs. It holds a permanent seat on the United Nations (UN) Security Council and this provides it immunity to security resolutions. China has increased its efforts in pursuing partnerships with other major powers, including the United States, Russia, and India.<sup>11</sup> China's overseas economic activity in Africa has expanded in recent years.<sup>12</sup> Therefore, China's diplomatic efforts seek to support its national economic development. China has many advantages that will support its continued status as the dominant nation in Asia. These advantages include its central location in Asia, large land area, and massive population.

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<sup>10</sup> United Kingdom Ministry of Defense–Development, Concepts, and Doctrine Center, *Global Strategic Trends–out to 2045* (Shivenham, England: Ministry of Defense, August 2014), 93.

<sup>11</sup> Jenny Clegg, *China's Global Strategy* (New York: Pluto Press, 2009), 57.

<sup>12</sup> Kimberly Hsu and Craig Murray, *China's 2012 Defense White Paper: The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces* (Washington, DC: U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, May 2013).





Figure 1. China's 9 Dash Line Submitted to the UN

*Source:* EnerGeoPolitics, "China's Infamous '9 Dash Line' Map," November 26, 2012, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://energeopolitics.com/2012/11/26/chinas-infamous-9-dash-line-map>.

China's rises to power and subsequent assertiveness in dealing with territorial disputes with other Asian nations are a source of tension. Recently, China has used its power to reassert its longtime claim of sovereignty over the South China Sea (SCS) using a dashed line map (see figure 1). This 9 dash line map, submitted in 2009 in response to Vietnam and Malaysia submitting its territorial claim in the SCS to the UN Convention

on the Limits of the Continental Shelf, mirrored the 1947 Nationalist Chinese claim. China has failed to provide the UN a legal explanation for its claim and cites naval missions through the SCS and to the disputed islands by the Qing Empire as proof of sovereignty. China's 9 dash line and its occupation of islands in the SCS has created disputes with the nations of Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, and Vietnam (see figure 2).

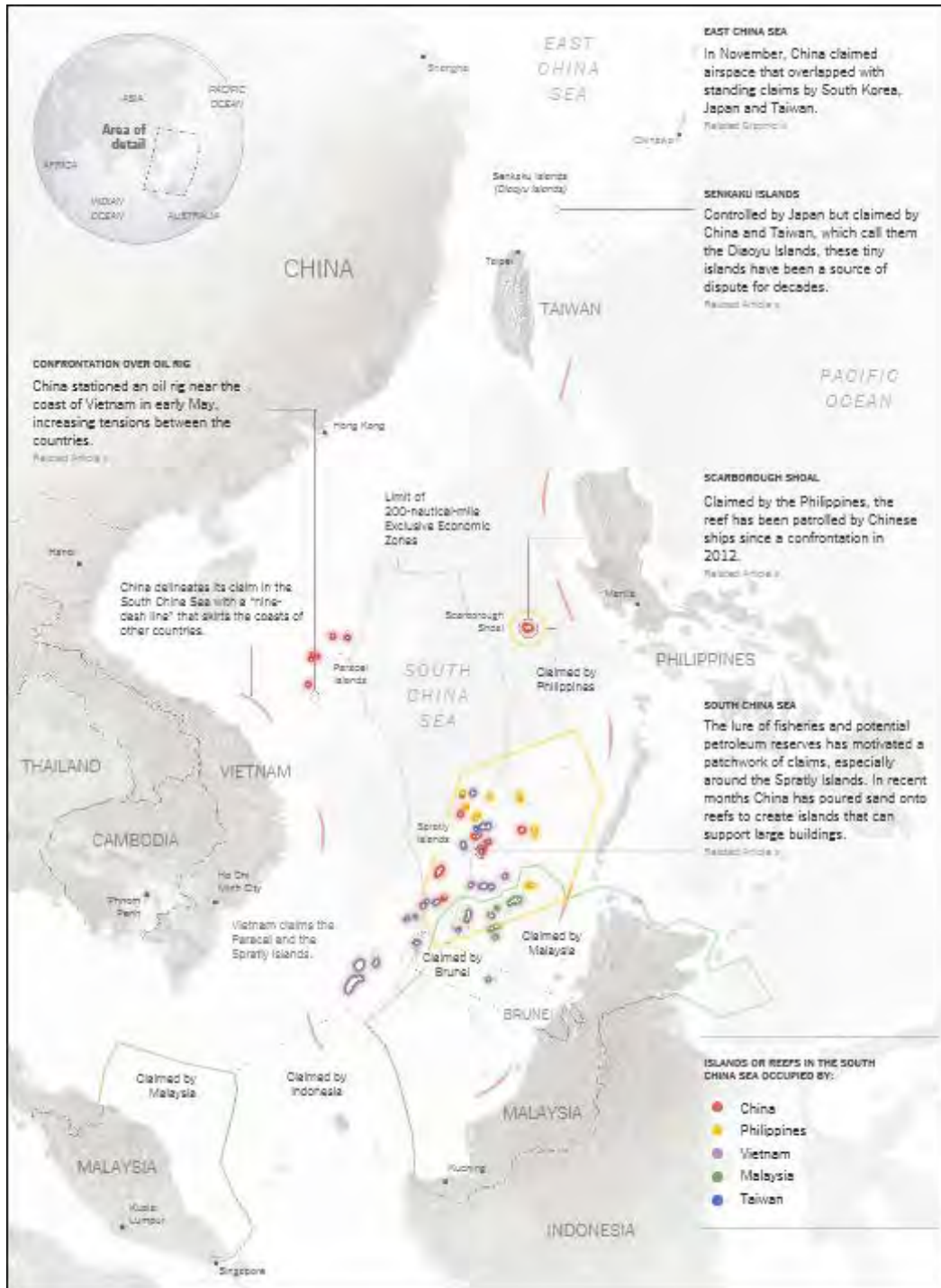


Figure 2. Map Showing the Location of the Disputed Islands in the SCS

Source: Derek Watkins, "Territorial Disputes in the Waters Near China," *New York Times*, May 8, 2014, accessed May 9, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/25/world/asia/claims-south-china-sea.html?\\_r=1](http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2014/02/25/world/asia/claims-south-china-sea.html?_r=1).

The SCS is strategically important, not only to China, but also to the world. Many factors account for the SCS's strategic importance, particularly the shipping lane and the natural resources. The United States, because of the importance of the region, has recently increased its engagement with the nations of the region and seeks to build better relations. Recent Chinese reactions to U.S. presence in the SCS have caused increased tensions between the two nations. The relationship between the United States and China is complex. The relationship can be characterized as partners, competitors, or adversaries; depending on the issue.<sup>13</sup> Considering the recent assertive stance by China in the SCS, the relationship there appears more adversarial.<sup>14</sup> China's actions in the territorial disputes in the SCS received a response from President Obama in the 2015 *National Security Strategy* (NSS), which stated, "we remain alert to China's military modernization and reject any role for intimidation in resolving territorial disputes."<sup>15</sup>

The ongoing tensions between China and other SCS nations revolve around territorial disputes over the Spratly and Paracel Islands and the Scarborough Shoal. China's most active rival is Vietnam.<sup>16</sup> Vietnam and China have a history of armed

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<sup>13</sup> Randall Doyle, *The Roots of War in the 21st Century: Geography, Hegemony, and Politics in Asia-Pacific* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2009), 85.

<sup>14</sup> Howard W. French, "China's Dangerous Game," *The Atlantic*, October 13, 2014, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/11/chinas-dangerous-game/380789>.

<sup>15</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy* (Washington, DC: The White House, February 2015).

<sup>16</sup> International Crisis Group, "Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses," *Crisis Group Asia Report*, 229 (July 24, 2012): 2, accessed March 15, 2015, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/~media/Files/asia/north-east-asia/229-stirring-up-the-south-china-sea-ii-regional-responses.pdf>.

conflict over disputed territorial claims. The two countries fought over disputed island claims in 1974 and 1988, as well as fighting a short ground war in northern Vietnam in 1979.<sup>17</sup> In the aftermath of the 1974 conflict, China gained control over the entire Paracel Island chain. The 1988 conflict gave China possession of the Johnson Reef in the Spratly Islands.

The U.S military is striving to maintain its influence in Asia, but confronts many challenges. The United States has long used its alliances in the Asia-Pacific to underwrite security. Now, instead of increased military spending, the United States seeks new opportunities to partner with nations in order to advance its goals in Asia.<sup>18</sup> The 2015 NSS identified Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia as new opportunities to partnering in Asia.<sup>19</sup> Vietnam and Malaysia have territorial disputes in the SCS while all three have an Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) that overlaps with China's 9 dash line map.

The ties between the United States and Vietnam have grown closer since the two countries normalized relations in 1995.<sup>20</sup> An expanded security partnership between the United States and Vietnam could advance both nations' objectives in the SCS. Vietnam desires to expand its relationship with the United States for several reasons. One is to highlight to the international community Vietnam's struggle with China.<sup>21</sup> A United

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<sup>17</sup> International Crisis Group, "Stirring up the South China Sea (II)," 2.

<sup>18</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 2015, 1.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>20</sup> James Bellacqua, *The China Factor in U.S.-Vietnam Relations* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, March 2012), 5.

<sup>21</sup> International Crisis Group, "Stirring up the South China Sea (II)," 4.

States and Vietnam (US-VN) security partnership could bring to the forefront Vietnam's territorial dispute and the potential for U.S. support for Vietnam's claim. Economically, the United States is the largest source of foreign direct investment into Vietnam and is the top target for Vietnamese exports.<sup>22</sup> A closer relationship with the United States would advance Vietnam's economic objectives and help to expand its diplomatic network. Conversely, Vietnam has proven to be economically beneficial for the United States by providing U.S. companies an alternative to China for high-tech and low labor cost manufacturing.<sup>23</sup> Regardless of what Vietnam's security partnership with the United States becomes, Vietnam is a key impediment for China in meeting its goal of controlling the SCS, and a security partnership with the United States would strengthen Vietnam's position.

Vietnam is a capable opponent to China in the territorial disputes in the SCS. Vietnam has been vocal and active in countering China's claims and is expanding its security relationships with other strong nations, notably the United States, Russia, and India. Several characteristics contribute to Vietnam's ability to counter China's claim in the SCS; most notably, they are Vietnam's large population of ninety-three million, growing economy, enhanced military power, strategic location, and legal basis for its claim.<sup>24</sup> The economy of Vietnam is currently growing at a rate of five percent, which is

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<sup>22</sup> Bellacqua, 1.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>24</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "East and Southeast Asia: Vietnam," *The World Factbook*, accessed December 31, 2014, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/vm.html>.

a healthy rate of growth and faster than most of the developed world.<sup>25</sup> Vietnam's economy, measured by GDP, is roughly the size of the wealthy nation of Switzerland. When ranking GDP per capita, Vietnam ranks 168th out of 228 countries in the world.<sup>26</sup> This means that although Vietnam's overall economic output is in the top third of the world, the Vietnamese people are relatively poor. Although, its overall wealth is improving; statistically, Vietnam has reached the level of a lower-middle income country in the world.<sup>27</sup> This economic growth supports Vietnam's ascent as a leading regional power.<sup>28</sup>

Despite its economic challenges, Vietnam has steadily increased its military spending and improved its capabilities. In 2014, Vietnam increased its military spending by 5.5 percent to \$4.26 billion dollars.<sup>29</sup> Continued economic growth has enabled Vietnam to upgrade its air and naval forces. Since 2009, Vietnam has purchased six Kilo-class submarines from Russia, two Sigma-class frigates from the Netherlands, and added

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<sup>25</sup> OECD.StatExtracts, "Quarterly National Accounts: Quarterly Growth Rates of Real GDP, Change over Previous Quarter," Organisation for Economic and Co-Operation and Development, accessed May 9, 2015, <https://stats.oecd.org/index.aspx?queryid=350>.

<sup>26</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "East and Southeast Asia: Vietnam."

<sup>27</sup> William T. Wilson, "Beating the Middle-Income Trap in Southeast Asia," The Heritage Foundation, August 27, 2014, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2014/08/beating-the-middle-income-trap-in-southeast-asia>.

<sup>28</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, "The Vietnam Solution," *The Atlantic*, May 21, 2012, 6, accessed February 21, 2015, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2012/06/the-vietnam-solution/308969>.

<sup>29</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 293.

an order for twelve more Su-30MK2 combat aircraft.<sup>30</sup> These purchases offer Vietnam options for countering Chinese aggression in the SCS.

The geography of Vietnam also puts it in a unique position in the SCS dispute compared to other claimants in the dispute. Vietnam is the only country with a SCS claim that shares a land border with China, a fact that increases the risk for Vietnam in dealing with China. The 1,350-kilometer-long land border separating Vietnam from China has been a point of contention between the two countries in the past.<sup>31</sup> China and Vietnam did not make a final border agreement and demarcation until 2009.<sup>32</sup> A miscalculation of between the two in the SCS could result in further escalation of conflict on to land.

Vietnam's history as a French colony provides a legal precedent for claiming control over the Spratly and Paracel Islands, and some argue a stronger legal claim than China. From 1887-1954, the French claimed both island chains as part of its Vietnamese colony (see figure 3). France, acting in the name of Vietnamese Kingdom, first stationed military forces in the Paracel and Spratly Islands in the 1920s.<sup>33</sup> Vietnam has used these historical arguments as a basis for its formal claim to the UN, which makes Vietnam a capable opponent in an international court should the competing claims be resolved there.

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<sup>30</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 294.

<sup>31</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, "East and Southeast Asia: Vietnam."

<sup>32</sup> Edward N. Luttwak, *Rise of China vs. the Logic of Strategy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, November 2012), 149.

<sup>33</sup> Hong Thao Nguyen, "Vietnam's Position on Sovereignty over the Paracels and Spratlys: Its Maritime Claim," *Journal of East Asia International Law* 1 (May 2012): 168, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://ssrn.com/abstract=2123861> or <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.2123861>.



Thus far, solving the dispute through international courts is something China has adamantly refused.

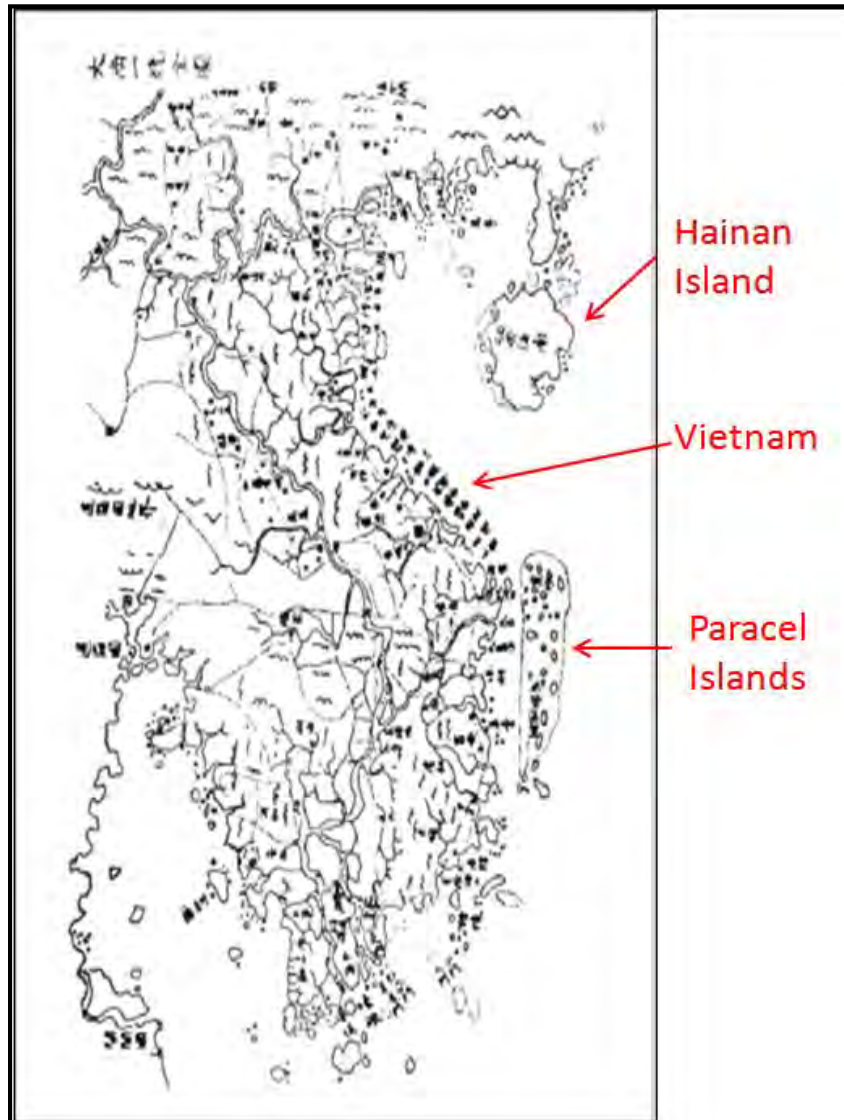


Figure 3. An 1838 Map Released by Vietnam in 1981 Showing the Paracel Islands as Part of Vietnam

Source: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *The Hoang Sa And Truong Sa archipelagoes Vietnamese Territories*, White Paper, 1981, Scribd, 19, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://www.scribd.com/doc/56818051/VN-White-Paper-1981#scribd>.

None of the nations opposed to China's territorial claims in the SCS are able to resist Chinese coercive measures alone. China's military power is overwhelmingly superior to any other littoral nation in the SCS region. Vietnam, and the other claimants in the dispute with China, seek to develop a security partnership with the United States to act as a counter balance. From the U.S. perspective, if China gained control of a large portion of the SCS, then the U.S. ability to navigate through the SCS could be at risk. As a result, the interests between the United States and Vietnam have converged. Professor Carlyle A. Thayer of the Australian Defense Force Academy summed up the convergence of US-VN interests by stating, "both share an interest in preventing China . . . from dominating seaborne trade routes and enforcing territorial claims through coercion."<sup>34</sup> The possibility of an expanded US-VN security partnership, based on converging interests, is the basis for this research.

#### Purpose and Research Goals

The purpose of this research is to analyze the viability of a security partnership between the United States and Vietnam and if that partnership could help the United States attain its objectives in the region. An analysis of China's strategy in the SCS examines potential threats to U.S. objectives and discusses the risk for each option available to the United States. This research hypothesizes that a more active and long-term security partnership between the United States and Vietnam is in the interest of both nations.

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<sup>34</sup> Kaplan, "The Vietnam Solution."

### Primary Research Question

Does an advancement of a security partnership between the United States and Vietnam help attain U.S. objectives in the SCS?

### Secondary Research Questions

What are the strategies of the United States, China, and Vietnam in the SCS?

What are the strengths and weaknesses of the United States, China, and Vietnam that could affect the resolution of the disputes in the SCS?

What are the feasible, acceptable, and suitable options for a security partnership between the United States and Vietnam?

What are the risks involved in pursuing further security partnerships with Vietnam?

### Assumptions

This research makes two basic assumptions about the disputes in the SCS and the involvement of the United States in the region. First, that the SCS will continue to be important economically, politically, and therefore the United States will desire and plan for a continuous military role in the region. Second, there will not be a major shift in policy in the next ten years that will alter the desired strategic end state of any of the major actors in the dispute. Literature in this research will test the validity of the second assumption.

### Limitations

The boundaries of this research are limited to open source literature. Classified material will not be included. Literature in the Vietnamese or Chinese languages will not be used, only English translations.

### Delimitations

This paper examines possible security strategies dealing with territorial disputes in the SCS. The research will primarily discuss objectives and strategic interests of the United States, China, and Vietnam. Other regional powers may play critical roles in the future outcomes of the dispute, but the research is limited to those three countries. Vietnam is the primary focus for this research as a potential security partner for the United States, although there may exist other countries in the region that could also provide the United States with an opportunity for an expanded security partnership.

### Key Considerations

Current U.S. policy is not to take a position or favor any nation's claim in the SCS disputes.<sup>35</sup> This research does not seek to advocate a particular country's position in the disputes. It does attempt to evaluate the importance of the relationship between Vietnam and the United States, especially if that relationship risks conflict with China. The relationship between China and the United States may be "the most important bilateral relationship in the world."<sup>36</sup> The United States is still the world's most powerful country,

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<sup>35</sup> Michael McDevitt, CNA Occasional Paper, "The South China Sea: Assessing U.S Policy and Options for the Future" (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analysis and Solutions, October 2014), 2.

<sup>36</sup> Zhu, 167.

but must contend with China as a rising power and continue to develop a strategy to further its objectives in the SCS. China's actions to control the SCS require an appropriate strategic response if the United States wants to operate freely and maintain influence in the region. An appropriate response may or may not involve a further development of a US-VN security partnership, and this research analyzes that question.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW AND METHODOLOGY

#### Overview of Literature on Asia and the South China Sea

This research sought sources that could provide an understanding of the factors that led to the SCS becoming a flashpoint for possible conflict and an area of strategic importance in the world. When looking at causes of possible conflict in the Asia-Pacific, a book titled *The Roots of War in the 21st Century* by Randall Doyle is a significant source. Doyle's book provides an analysis of the challenges associated with international politics in the Asia-Pacific region. His study on China focuses on the views of political theorists and analysts on China's rise in power. He argues the United States is wrestling with whether or not China's rise is a threat to U.S. objectives. Doyle provides evidence that many of the institutions and people that collaborate to develop U.S. policy agree that the relationship with China is at a pivotal moment; however, there is no agreement on a comprehensive China strategy.

Doyle provides possible responses by key U.S. allies and partners in the region to China's rise. He points out that U.S. allies are increasingly dependent on the Chinese economy. Doyle believes that U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific is diminishing. Which attributes not to the decline in U.S. power, but to the expanding influence of China. To counter China's expanding influence, Doyle suggests that the United States is practicing a strategy of soft containment similar to the strategy used during the Cold War.<sup>37</sup> *The*

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<sup>37</sup> Doyle, 130-131.

*Roots of War in the 21st Century* provides a view of the strategic environment in the SCS and is useful analysis on possible strategies to deal with China's rise.

Many overview studies provided information about the strategic economic environment of the SCS region. The National Defense University, in conjunction with the Center for Naval Analyses, commissioned a study of U.S. economic objectives in the SCS in *Chokepoints: Maritime Economic Concerns in Southeast Asia*. This study argues, one of the most vital chokepoints in the world is located between the Vietnam's coast and the Spratly Islands. This study outlines U.S. maritime objectives in the SCS as well as the objectives of other littoral nations. This study provides useful information about the amounts, origins, and types of trade that flow through the SCS. This study also explains the connection between U.S. policy in the SCS and the actions taken by the U.S. Navy to implement U.S. policy, notably the efforts in securing global trade.<sup>38</sup>

#### A US-VN Partnership

There are numerous sources of information that provide background and overview information concerning the territorial and maritime disputes in the SCS. Robert Kaplan's book, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific*, published in 2014, is one of the more recent and comprehensive sources. This book is particularly relevant to this research. Kaplan dedicates a chapter to Vietnam's relationship with China and the significant role Vietnam will play in future outcomes of disputes. This book also argues that Vietnam will be a central figure in the struggle to resist Chinese domination and is a possible strategic security partner for the United States. Kaplan argues that the

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<sup>38</sup> John H. Noer and David Gregory, *Chokepoints: Maritime Economic Concerns in Southeast Asia* (Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, 1996), 1.

Vietnamese national identity is based on its history of resistance to Chinese domination. Vietnam's national identity and history of resistance against overwhelming powers suggests that Vietnam will continue to be active in its struggle to prevent China from domination in the SCS.

Kaplan also argues that Vietnam's population would be receptive to a strategic partnership with the United States. The population lacks the animosity toward the United States that one might expect. The population has psychological distance from the U.S.-Vietnam War and the once tense post-war relationship with the United States. Kaplan concludes that a *de facto* partnership began in 2010 when Secretary of State Hillary Clinton spoke at the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) summit in Hanoi. At the summit, Secretary Clinton stated that the United States has a national interest in the SCS and is ready to participate in multilateral efforts to resolve territorial disputes.<sup>39</sup> *Asia's Cauldron* provides evidence that a foundation for a strategic partnership between the United States and Vietnam already exists. All the countries in the dispute align against China, but are not strong enough to resist alone, and therefore, look to the United States for diplomatic and military support.<sup>40</sup> He describes the motivations and the strategic direction that Vietnam seeks, which supports the development of a security partnership with United States.

Edward Luttwak provides another valuable perspective concerning political relationships in Asia-Pacific. What is most valuable to this research is his discussion of

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<sup>39</sup> Robert D. Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the End of a Stable Pacific* (New York: Random House, 2014), 62.

<sup>40</sup> Kaplan, "The Vietnam Solution," 5.



Vietnam's contentious relationship with China and what effect that relationship will have on Vietnam's relationship with the United States. In his book, *The Rise of China vs. The Logic of Strategy*, Luttwak discusses the historic relationship between China and Vietnam and outlines the possibility that the United States and Vietnam might one day be allies. A conclusion in this book is that Vietnam did not seek a closer relationship with the United States; but rather, a relationship out of necessity was forged because of China's repeated maritime provocations in the SCS.<sup>41</sup>

Luttwak also states that based on Vietnam's history of human rights violations, that a growing relationship with the United States defies the norm in U.S. foreign relations. This is overcome by strategic necessity, which he argues is a stronger motivation to act than politics or trade, therefore, the US-VN partnership will continue to advance. Luttwak is a well-known and renowned strategist and political theorist. He concludes a strengthening US-VN partnership will occur based on converging objectives and strategies. Luttwak reaches some of the same conclusions about the potential future relationship between United States and Vietnam as Kaplan does; but Luttwak provides a different perspective and evidence to support his conclusions.

#### Relations in the Asia-Pacific

Zhiquan Zhu, a professor at the University of Bridgeport, wrote a comprehensive study using the framework of power transition theory in his 2006 book, *U.S.-China Relations in the 21st Century, Power Transition and Peace*. The theories of power transition are valuable to this research because Zhu concludes that if Chinese elements of

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<sup>41</sup> Luttwak, 156.

national power continue to grow, then it is very likely that China will challenge the United States for dominance in the Asia-Pacific region.<sup>42</sup> Another conclusion is that China's rise in power is inevitable and that the best course of action for the United States is to influence China's rise so that the transition remains peaceful. In 2006, Zhu predicted that the epicenter of China's challenge of U.S. dominance in the Asia-Pacific would occur in the SCS. Zhu also argues that the deep connection between the United States and China makes the cost of conflict being inexcusably expensive, and therefore unlikely, given the current situation.

Mark E. Manyin's Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, titled *U.S.-Vietnam Relations in 2014: Current Issues and Implications for U.S. Policy*, was a key source for this research. His work provides a clear understanding of the intricacies of the expanding US-VN relationship. He outlined current initiatives between the two countries in the diplomatic, military, and economic arenas, and highlighted what issues were preventing further enhancement of US-VN relations.

### U.S. Strategy and Policy in the SCS

President Obama, in the opening statement of the 2015 NSS, stated that recent efforts in Asia-Pacific have produced better ties with partners.<sup>43</sup> The strengthening of existing relationships in the Asia-Pacific is a theme throughout this document. The 2015 NSS describes the U.S. enduring objectives of freedom of navigation, overflight, and safety of the air and maritime environments in the world. There is a stronger tone towards

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<sup>42</sup> Zhu, 125.

<sup>43</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 2015, intro.

China's threatening action in the SCS than in the 2010 NSS. In the 2015 NSS, Asia is referred to as center of influence for U.S. security strategy and emphasizes that U.S. allies in Asia are pivotal for maintaining security and retaining integration into the world economy. The safeguarding of global commons is a key strategic goal. To attain that goal the U.S. military will project its power in the global commons. In the discussion of the territorial disputes in Asia, the 2015 NSS advocates a code of conduct in the SCS in which China has repeatedly rejected.

The 2015 NSS stated, "we denounce coercion and assertive behaviors that threaten escalation. We encourage open channels of dialogue to resolve disputes peacefully in accordance with international law. We also support the early conclusion of an effective code of conduct for the South China Sea between China and ASEAN."<sup>44</sup> The language in the 2015 NSS provides evidence that the focus of U.S. policy and objectives has shifted to Asia. The 2015 NSS is also significant because it names Vietnam as a focus for building a deeper partnership and it provided evidence that reinforces conclusions of this research.<sup>45</sup>

The 2014 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) published in March 2014, under former Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel, provides a clear refocus towards the changing security environment and towards Asia as a growing center of power and influence in the world. The 2014 QDR provided security priorities, and the first priority listed was the

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<sup>44</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 2015, 13.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 24.

“rebalancing to the Asia-Pacific region to preserve peace and stability.”<sup>46</sup> The 2014 QDR points out that U.S. interests are linked to the security and stability of the Asia-Pacific and that the region is experiencing growing economic power, increased military spending, and increased competition over access to global domains. Part of the strategy to deal with these growing concerns is to advance security relationships in the region.<sup>47</sup> The 2014 QDR also outlined the positioning of naval forces in the Asia-Pacific region and providing tailored and responsive regionally aligned forces. The 2014 QDR a Department of Defense perspective on the U.S. strategic rebalance towards Asia. It also describes how the U.S. military will operate after more than a decade of Middle East conflict and amidst a reduction in forces.

In the 2012 National Defense Strategy (NDS), open access in East Asia in accordance with international law is emphasized.<sup>48</sup> This defense strategy expresses concern over China’s growing military power and the lack of transparency from China on what its strategic goals are with this expanding military. This defense strategy defined the area of Asia tied most directly to U.S. economic and security interests as the arc extending from the Western Pacific and East Asia into the Indian Ocean and South Asia.<sup>49</sup> In ensuring open access, the 2012 NDS stated that strengthening key alliances and expanding the network of cooperation is necessary. The security themes in this strategic

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<sup>46</sup> Secretary of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), V.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 16.

<sup>48</sup> East Asia as defined in the Appendix A of this research paper.

<sup>49</sup> U.S. President, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership*, 2.

document are an extension of the security themes laid out in previous national level security documents.

### Vietnam's Strategy, Policy, and Defense

Written works concerning Vietnam's Strategy are not as readily available as sources on the strategies of the United States and China. The Vietnamese Ministry of National Defense produced a White Paper titled *Vietnam National Defense* in 2009. Interestingly, this document was written in the same year as demarcation of the land and the sea border in the Gulf of Tonkin with China was completed, and provides important context concerning Vietnam's strategic environment. The organization is very similar to other national level military strategies.

In the first section, Vietnam lays out its security environment and its strategic direction. In line with U.S. and China's strategic security documents, *Vietnam National Defense* acknowledges the shifting of power and influence in the world, but describes a world that is moving toward a more multipolar environment, similar to China's national level military strategy. This document has the same caveats as China's national strategic documents and should be analyzed with an understanding that the target audience is the United States. It describes the challenges that the Vietnamese military face in their current operating environment and establishes the goals of its national defense policy.

The *Vietnam National Defense* outlines those goals as, "the maintenance of peaceful and stable environment for socio-economic development, industrialization and modernization; building the socialism-oriented market economy as the top national

interest and the consistent goal of its national defense policy.”<sup>50</sup> Vietnam does not discuss territorial disputes with China in the “East Sea,” which is Vietnam’s name for the SCS.<sup>51</sup> This is not unusual, because doing so would be very provocative towards China and other nations with which Vietnam has an active dispute. Vietnam also provided its view that the disputes should be resolved through peaceful means and using international organizations and laws. In this White Paper, Vietnam acknowledges the interconnectivity of the world and seeks active regional and international security cooperation.

The second section of *Vietnam National Defense* discussed Vietnam’s efforts to build national defense and acknowledges that building a modern national defense will require a modern economy; its goal is to become an industrialized nation by 2020.<sup>52</sup> The remainder of the document describes the organization of Vietnam People’s Army. *Vietnam’s National Defense* is not the sole source of information on Vietnam’s security strategy. This research also uses public statements, academic analysis, and current events during the period of study from news sources to analyze Vietnam’s strategy.

### China’s Strategy, Policy, and Defense in the SCS

In 2013, *The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces*, was published in English by the Information Office of the State Council, People’s Republic of China (PRC). The goal of *The Diversified Employment of China’s Armed Forces* is to inform

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<sup>50</sup> Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, *Vietnam National Defense* (Hanoi: Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2009), 18.

<sup>51</sup> The South China Sea is called the East Sea by Vietnam.

<sup>52</sup> Socialist Republic of Vietnam, Ministry of National Defense, *Vietnam National Defense*, 37.

the United States and its allies on the developments and missions of China's Armed Forces. The document contains five major sections. The first section is a discussion of China's new situation, challenges, and missions. The new situation described is a similar strategic environment that U.S. national strategic documents describes; an environment of Chinese growth in power and influence in the Asia-Pacific region. One difference of the strategic environment is that this document describes a multipolar world, with the United States and China as the main powers. Another difference is that China emphasizes the emergence of an information society and how that will play a greater role in the security environment.<sup>53</sup>

When discussing the challenges, the document states, "Some country has strengthened its Asia-Pacific military alliances, has expanded its military presence in the region, and has frequently made the situation there tense."<sup>54</sup> Although not specifically mentioning the United States, it is assumed that the country is the United States. The goals of China's Armed Forces are safeguarding national sovereignty, security, and territorial integrity, and to support the country's peaceful development. China's missions in support of those goals are said to be conducted in an information environment with intensifying military preparedness. The missions described that are pertinent to this research are merchant vessel protection and security support for China's oversea

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<sup>53</sup> Information Office of the State Council, The People's Republic of China, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces* (Beijing: The People's Republic of China, 2013), 2.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

interests.<sup>55</sup> These stated mission sets provide insights into what activities China envisions for the People's Liberation Army (PLA) and what will drive its future development.

When discussing the development of China's Armed Forces, China states that it seeks to further develop its blue water Navy capabilities and touts the recent commissioning of the *Liaoning* aircraft carrier and what impact this development will have on its ability to secure the maritime environment. China explains in detail the responsibilities of its armed forces in defense of its national sovereignty, security, and territorial Integrity. The last two sections are "Supporting National Economic and Social Development" and "Safeguarding World Peace and Regional Stability," which are devoted to the activities that the PLA will undertake to advance its domestic interest and its involvement in international organizations, namely the UN. This document is valuable to this research because it provides insights into how the Chinese want others to see its development. The information in *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Force*, in conjunction with other sources, provides a clear message of China's strategic direction and interests in the SCS. It also provides evidence that support conclusions on what actions China may take in dealing with the SCS territorial disputes.

In order to analyze China's development from the U.S. perspective, this research looked at the *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2014*. This report was published by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and provides a valuable assessment of China's strategy in the SCS, current capabilities, and future development goals. The purpose of this report is to inform Congress on China's Force Modernization Program and its probable security and military

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 3.



strategy over the next twenty years.<sup>56</sup> In terms of territorial disputes, this report quotes senior Chinese officials as stating that territorial integrity is a core Chinese issue. That statement could have enormous impact on stability in the Asia-Pacific. It also raises further questions. Does China consider the SCS disputed islands a core interest and, if so, what actions will China take?

This annual report provided an update on events that took place over the course of the previous year concerning China, including the provocations in the SCS. This report also includes information about China's military acquisition programs in 2014. Chapter two provides an assessment of China's strategy and is a very useful source of information for a comprehensive understanding of its strategy, specifically in the SCS. It discusses China's view of the first few decades of the 21st century as a period of strategic opportunity for China to greatly improve its position as a world power by increasing in diplomatic, military, and economic strength.<sup>57</sup> This chapter also describes China's military development goals, with the target year of 2020, and outlines how China believes the U.S. is practicing a Cold War era strategy of containment. This annual report also lays out China's goals, trends, and resources available to execute its Force Modernization Program. The final section of the report describes China's military-to-military engagements worldwide and analyzes the capabilities and order of battle of the PLA.

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<sup>56</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), accessed March 15, 2015, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014\\_DoD\\_China\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 15.

### Other Studies Relevant to this Research

The Congressional Research Service published a report, shortly after the announced rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific, titled, *Pivot to the Pacific? The Obama Administration's "Rebalancing" Toward Asia*. The purpose of this report was to inform Congress of the implications of the administration's rebalancing efforts towards Asia. It outlines what elements of national strategy are enduring from previous administrations, and what new elements of the rebalance will occur, such as troop rotations to Australia. This report was helpful in looking at the risks associated with the planned rebalance, especially as it pertains to the risk of the U.S. relationship with China.

The Center for Naval Analyses has commissioned a series of papers to explain U.S. strategic objectives in the SCS. Michael McDevitt summarized the policies of the United States, as derived from statements by recent secretaries of state, in his research titled, "The South China Sea: Assessing U.S Policy and Options for the Future." This document provided a starting point for this research in developing a comprehensive understanding of what the U.S. purpose, interests, objectives, and policies are in the SCS region, which helps determine the U.S. strategic direction as part of a strategic estimate of the SCS.

### Doctrine and Key Definitions

Several key pieces of U.S. and allied doctrine are used to frame the question this research seeks to answer. The first key piece is the Joint Publication (JP) 5-0, *Joint Operations Planning*, and the framework of a strategic estimate in JP 5-0 provides the

outline for the organization of this research.<sup>58</sup> Another source of U.S. joint doctrine used in this research is JP 3-0, *Joint Operations*. This provides a description of the fundamentals of joint operations; describes how strategic documents are used as guidance in developing contingency plans; and how joint forces employ elements of national power over a range of military operations. A Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis is the tool that is used to discover viable options for furthering of a US-VN partnership that support strategic goals. This analysis is best described in the United Kingdom's Joint Doctrine Publication 5-00, *Campaign Planning*. The term security partner is not well defined in U.S. military doctrine, but it is often used in national level strategic guidance. A security partnership is derived from two concepts: security cooperation and partner nation.<sup>59</sup> According to JP 1-02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms, a partner nation is "a nation that the United States works with in a specific situation or operation."<sup>60</sup> Security cooperation is defined as "all DoD interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific US security interests, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S.

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<sup>58</sup> See Research Methodology of this thesis.

<sup>59</sup> Dr. Daniel Gilewitch and Mr. John Cary, professors at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff Officer's College, aided in the development of the term security partners in this research over an email conversation on March 16, 2015. They guided the research of Army and joint doctrine on the evolution of the doctrine concerning the terms security cooperation and partner nation, which will be used together to as a security partnership.

<sup>60</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1-02, *Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2010), 187.

forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.”<sup>61</sup> For this research, a security partnership is an amalgamation of the two terms of doctrine, and will be defined as two or more nations that work together in security operations that build defense relationships, promote interests and objectives, develop capabilities, and provide access to defense related resources.

### Research Methodology and Chapter Outline

This research is qualitative in nature using a strategic estimate and a SWOT analysis as the frameworks for organization. The strategic estimate is found in Appendix B of JP 5.0. The five sections of strategic estimate are: (1) Strategic Direction; (2) Strategic Environment; (3) Assessment of Challenges; (4) Potential Opportunities; and (5) Assessment of Risk.<sup>62</sup> A SWOT analysis is a way to identify internal strengths and weaknesses, recognize external opportunities and threats for a particular entity, and thus understand the balance between protecting strengths, mitigating weaknesses, exploiting opportunities, and minimizing threats.<sup>63</sup> The SWOT analysis will aid in the development of the strategic estimate by assisting in the assessment of challenges and identifying opportunities.

The strategic direction of this research discusses U.S., China, and Vietnam’s purpose, interest, objectives, and policies as a nation and in the SCS. The strategic

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 219.

<sup>62</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5.0, *Joint Operations Planning* (Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2011), B-1.

<sup>63</sup> United Kingdom, Joint Doctrine Publication 5-00, *Campaign Planning* (Shrivenham, England: United Kingdom Ministry of Defense, July 2013), 1-8.

direction outlines strategic interests based on the hierarchy of strategic concepts that uses an ends, ways, and means construct to organize how a nation expresses its strategy. Ends are strategic goals of nations that are expressed as purposes, interests, and objectives. Ways are actions designed to obtain specific objectives; and Means are the tangible assets or agreement to use those assets, and are expressed as commitments and programs. The strategic environment is analyzed by discussing the relevant geographic, cultural, and political factors in the SCS region. The strategic environment covers the adversarial, friendly, and other forces in the SCS. China is the adversarial force in this research. The friendly forces are the U.S. allies and partners in the SCS; the Philippines and Vietnam. Other forces are other countries involved in the SCS dispute; Malaysia and Brunei. The strengths and weaknesses of the United States and Vietnam will be in relation to China. China will be compared to the United States and vice-versa. The opportunities for a US-VN security partnership will be what strengths that Vietnam has to support U.S. weaknesses in comparison to Chinese strengths. In this analysis, threats are Chinese strengths over the United States in the SCS that cannot be mitigated through a security partnership with Vietnam.

Chapter 1, the introductory chapter, provides the context for the research, defines the problem, and refines the issues. Chapter 2 contains the literature review and methodology. This literature review provides an overview of the primary references used to develop this research paper and the methodology describes the organization of the analysis conducted. Chapter 3 contains the strategic direction, focusing on the United States, China, and Vietnam; and the strategic environment of the SCS and concludes with a discussion on U.S. challenges and the forces in the SCS. Chapter 4 is a SWOT analysis

that will identify opportunities and threats for the United States in the SCS. Chapter 5 will present available options for a US-VN security partnership and their associated risks. This research will end with a recommended option for a US-VN security partnership that helps attain U.S. objectives in the SCS. Analyzing the options and the risks of those options will answer the primary research question: Does an advancement of a security partnership between the United States and Vietnam help attain U.S. objectives in the SCS?

## CHAPTER 3

### STRATEGIC DIRECTION AND THE ENVIRONMENT

For most Americans the word ‘Vietnam’ spells confusion and complexity. It had never been an area of significant interest to them before, and they awoke rather suddenly to its very existence only after their government had made what they were told were irrevocable commitments there.

—George M. Kahin and John W. Lewis,  
*The United States in the Asia-Pacific since 1945*

#### The Geographic Environment

The maritime domain is an integral part of the Southeast Asian region. The sea connects the people of the area together and is located to the south and east of the Asian land mass. Its waters provide the borders for the nations of China, Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesian, and Vietnam. The surface area of the SCS is approximately 3.5 million kilometers and is slightly larger than the Indian Sub-Continent (see figure 4).<sup>64</sup>

The boundaries of the sea are archipelago islands chains and access to the SCS is through a series of straits. The main straits that enter the SCS are, counter clockwise from west to east, Malacca, Sunda, Lombok, Wetar, Balabac, Luzon, and Taiwan straits. The SCS’s numerous narrow passages and islands make it a natural chokepoint for economic activity passing through the sea (see figure 5).

The SCS contains numerous islands and land formations within its boundaries. The land features in the SCS are grouped into five main formations. They are the Paracel,

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<sup>64</sup> Jin Xianshi, “Marine Fishery Resources and Management in China,” National Oceanography Data Center, October 29, 2000, accessed December 31, 2014, <http://www.lib.noaa.gov/retiredsites/china/marineresource.htm>.

Pratas, and Spratly Islands, the Scarborough Reef, and the Macclesfield Bank. The Macclesfield Bank is a raised seabed of underwater reefs and shoals that does not break the surface of the sea. The most of the islands in the SCS are small and mostly uninhabitable. Many of the naturally inhabitable islands of the SCS are part of the Paracel Islands chain (see figure 6).





Figure 4. Map of the SCS

*Source:* U.S. Energy Information Administration, “South China Sea,” U.S. Department of Commerce, February 7, 2013, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=scs>.



Figure 5. Major Straits of the SCS

Source: David Rosenberg, ed., “Legal and Political Maps,” The South China Sea, February 5, 2015, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.southchinasea.org/maps/legal-and-political-maps>. Highlight of the locations of the Straits added by author.



Figure 6. Major Grouping of Land Formations in the SCS

Source: David Rosenberg, ed., "Legal and Political Maps," The South China Sea, February 5, 2015, accessed March 29, 2015, <http://www.southchinasea.org/maps/legal-and-political-maps>.

### The Demographic Environment

The SCS region is located at the crossroads of Indian and Chinese influence and its people are diverse. The culture of the region is a modern day representation of its

geography, centuries of influence by Chinese, Indian, and Middle Eastern cultures, as well as contemporary influence by European and American colonial activities.<sup>65</sup> The SCS is home to approximately two billion people, or over thirty percent of the world's population.<sup>66</sup> The population growth in the SCS is stable, with Southeast Asia growing at an average growth rate of 1.17 percent from 2010 to the present.<sup>67</sup> The stable growth rate of the SCS littoral nations prevents the problems associated with an aging population and shrinking work force that some of the developing nations in Japan and Western Europe must confront.

There are many ethnicities and languages spoken by the people who surround the SCS. There are three main language groups: Sino-Tibetan, Austroasiatic, and Austronesia. The Sino-Tibetan language is widely spoken in the northern part of the SCS, to include the Mandarin and Cantonese languages spoken in China and Taiwan, and by Chinese population spread throughout the rest of Southeast Asia. Austroasiatic is the language group of the people on the Indochina peninsula and includes the languages of Vietnamese and Khmer. Maritime Southeast Asia is dominated by Austronesian languages, which include the languages of Tagalog (Philippines), Malay, and Indonesian. The ethnic groups of the region generally follow the same pattern of distribution as the

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<sup>65</sup> Sarah Raine and Christian Le Miere, *Regional Disorder: The South China Sea Disputes* (London, England: The International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2013), 105.

<sup>66</sup> United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, Population Estimates and Projections Section, "World Population Prospects: The 2012 Revision," United Nations, 2014, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://esa.un.org/wpp/Excel-Data/population.htm>.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.



languages. The SCS region is very diverse and represents a mixture of people at the fault line of two great civilizations: Chinese and Indian.

The SCS region is also a meeting point of major religions of the world. Islam, originating in the Middle East, is the majority religion in the countries of Malaysia and Indonesia and has a large following on the Island of Mindanao in southern Philippines. Buddhism, which originated in India but now centers in East Asia, has a substantial following in Vietnam, China, and Taiwan. Christianity is the majority religion of the Philippines, but has a substantial minority of followers in China and Vietnam. Hinduism is also prevalent in the region. It has spread widely throughout the region and is indicative of the historical ties with South Asia. Confucianism, more of a philosophy than a religion, is a strong cultural influence in many nations that surround the SCS. Religious, ethnic, and cultural difference has been a source of conflict in other parts of the world; however, this is not true in the SCS. Currently, the primary sources of conflict are based on tensions over economic competition and disputes over sovereignty.

### The Economic Environment

Southeast Asian economies have been among the fastest growing economies in the world since the turn of the century.<sup>68</sup> The economies are relatively open, and operate using international trade standards and generally now use capitalistic principles. Notable economic growth has occurred outside of China. Two of the most impressive have been

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<sup>68</sup> Wilson, 1.

Indonesia and the Philippines, experiencing a six percent growth in GDP from 2011 to 2014 and have consistently grown above four percent since 2000.<sup>69</sup>

Even with impressive growth, the economies of littoral nations that surround the SCS have significant hurdles to overcome, especially infrastructure development and corruption. Many of the countries are still relatively poor, as judged by western standards, using GDP per capita as a measurement. The littoral nations can overcome these economic challenges with proper oversight and policies that deal with the underlining economic issues that are hindering growth. There is also a great potential for future growth. This potential is an opportunity for the United States to help the economies realize that potential and benefit as well from the growth in the region.

The SCS provides direct economic benefit to the littoral nations from natural resources and the commercial traffic that transit the area. As a shipping lane, the SCS connects the population centers in East Asia to the Middle East via the Indian Ocean. Half of the world's cargo tonnage per year passes through the SCS.<sup>70</sup>

The western entrance to the SCS is through the Strait of Malacca (see figure 7). The Strait of Malacca is the most direct and preferred passage into the SCS from the Middle East. The majority of the tonnage that passes through the Strait of Malacca are energy resources bound for the large economies in East Asia. The tiny nation of Singapore, which lies at the southeastern exit of the Strait of Malacca and at a natural deepwater port, is an economic benefactor of its strategic geographic location on the

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>70</sup> U.S Energy Information Administration, *South China Sea: Oil and Natural Gas* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Energy, March 2008).

strait.<sup>71</sup> The massive flow of resources through the strait has helped Singapore become one of the most developed and wealthy nations in the world. Every day, over a quarter of the world's oil and half of the world's natural gas trade passes through the strait that is 1.7 mile wide at its narrowest point (see table 1).<sup>72</sup> Disruption to this vital sea-lane would have adverse effects on the world economy; that fact makes the Strait of Malacca and the SCS sea-lane strategically important to many nations in the world.

The abundant natural resources contained in and under the SCS, such as fish, oil, and natural gas reserves are valuable commodities. There eleven billion barrels or probable oil reserves and 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas under the SCS.<sup>73</sup> Even though reaching full potential for energy production in the SCS has faced difficulties; current energy production levels provide a substantial source of revenue for the littoral nations (see table 2). The countries in the region extract the energy resources in the SCS using a mix of nationalized and foreign firms and are increasing production, lessening these nations' reliance on energy imports from the Middle East. Territorial disputes have prevented the nations of the SCS from harnessing the full potential of energy reserves.

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<sup>71</sup> Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 93.

<sup>72</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, "South China Sea," U.S. Department of Commerce, February 7, 2013, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=scs>; U.S. Energy Information Administration, "World Oil Transit Checkpoints," U.S. Department of Energy, November 10, 2014, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=wotc&trk=p3>.

<sup>73</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, "South China Sea," 2.



Figure 7. Strait of Malacca

Source: Vijay Sakhaja, “Malacca: Who’s to Pay for Smooth Sailing,” *Asian Times Online*, May 16, 2007, accessed February 10, 2015, [http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast\\_Asia/IE16Ae01.html](http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Southeast_Asia/IE16Ae01.html).

Table 1. Oil Flow through the Malacca Strait

<b><u>Millions of Barrels per day (Mbpd)</u></b>	<b><u>2011</u></b>	<b><u>2012</u></b>	<b><u>2013</u></b>
Malacca Strait (Mbpd)	14.6	15.1	15.2
World Total Maritime Oil Trade (Mbpd)	55.6	56.7	56.5
<b>Percentage of World Total</b>	<b>26.3 %</b>	<b>26.6 %</b>	<b>26.9 %</b>

Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, “World Oil Transit Checkpoints,” U.S. Department of Energy, November 10, 2014, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=wotc&trk=p3>.



Table 2. SCS Energy Production, 2011

<b><u>Country</u></b>	<b><u>Oil Production (1000 Bpd)</u></b>	<b><u>Natural Gas Production (billion cubic feet)</u></b>
Brunei	120	400
China	250	600
Indonesia	60	200
Malaysia	500	1,800
Philippines	25	100
Vietnam	300	300

*Source:* U.S. Energy Information Administration, “South China Sea,” U.S. Department of Commerce, February 7, 2013, accessed December 29, 2014, <http://www.eia.gov/countries/regions-topics.cfm?fips=scs>.

The climate of the SCS, in the tropical and subtropical zones, supports an abundance of sea life, and therefore the littoral nations of the SCS have created a substantial fishing industry. The SCS has approximately 100 fish species that are of economic value.<sup>74</sup> The fishing industry provides littoral nations with a valuable food source and an export commodity. The SCS provides a sustained and valuable economic benefit to the countries that fish the waters; although, competition among the littoral nations of the SCS have prevented the fishing industry from reaching its full potential.

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<sup>74</sup> Xianshi, 5.

### The Political Environment

The littoral nations of the SCS govern their populations in a variety of ways. Understanding the system of governance of a nation is important, because it affects how the United States engages each country diplomatically. China and Vietnam both have a one party political system led by a Communist regime. Taiwan's government is a democratic republic with a president as the head of state. Malaysia's system of government is a constitutional monarchy, borrowed from the British, but administered in a much more authoritarian manner. Brunei is an Islamic monarchy that governs using both English common law and Islamic sharia law. The country of Indonesia governs by a constitutional republic. The national government is at the center of power in Indonesia and a president, as the head of state, holds many of the same authorities that the U.S. president holds. Singapore operates a parliamentary style democracy. Like many other factors, the political styles and its leaders are diverse in the SCS nations. In dealing with sovereignty disputes, relations among governments play a key role.

### The Legal Environment

#### UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)

The definitive international set of rules that applies to the territorial disputes in the SCS is the 1982 UNCLOS. This convention sets the accepted legal precedent for claiming economic rights to areas of the SCS.<sup>75</sup> The UNCLOS established the dimensions of the sea boundaries and limitations, which depending on geography,

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<sup>75</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas*, 1982, accessed December 17, 2014, [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos\\_e.pdf](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/unclos_e.pdf).

provides nations with certain access and economic rights. Territorial seas are areas that extend out twelve nautical miles from a nation's coast and are sovereign territory of that nation. Article Three in Section II of the UNCLOS states, "Every State has the right to establish the breadth of its territorial sea up to a limit not exceeding 12 nautical miles, measured from baselines determined in accordance with this Convention."<sup>76</sup>

In the event that adjacent nations' coastlines do not allow the maximum extent of the territorial seas, then the territorial seas extend to the median line. It is important to note that although territorial seas are the sovereignty territory of a nation, the UNCLOS states all nations have a right to peaceful and continuous passage of territorial seas. Another important aspect of the UNCLOS is the establishment of an EEZ. The EEZ spans vertically from the continental shelf floor, up to the sea's surface, and extends horizontally out to 200 nautical miles from the coastline.<sup>77</sup> A nation has the economic right to the sea life and resources in the seabed in its EEZ.<sup>78</sup>

The definition and determination of an inhabitable island has played an important role in the SCS. This is important because if a land feature is determined to be an inhabitable island then the country that possesses that island is entitled a twelve-nautical mile territorial sea and a possible 200NM EEZ. However, very few islands are inhabited on the SCS (see figure 8). This has not stopped China from changing the facts on the ground. China has started extensive land reclamation projects in the SCS that have raised

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<sup>76</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas*.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Mark E. Rosen, *Challenges to Public Order and the Seas* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, March 2014), 1.

land features and created structures in efforts to gain possible recognition as an inhabitable island and for military use.

The United States is not a signatory of the UNCLOS; however, it adheres to its principles and expects to navigate freely and conduct peaceful military activities in the SCS.<sup>79</sup> China signed the UNCLOS with caveat, but does not always adhere to the principles. The caveat submitted to the UN states, “The People’s Republic of China reaffirms that the provisions of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea concerning innocent passage through the territorial sea shall not prejudice the right of a coastal State to request, in accordance with its laws and regulations, a foreign State to obtain advance approval from or give prior notification to the coastal State for the passage of its warships through the territorial sea of the coastal State.”<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>79</sup> McDevitt, 5.

<sup>80</sup> United Nations, Oceans and Laws of the Seas, Division for Ocean Affairs and the Law of the Sea, “Declaration of Statement,” United Nations, October 29, 2013, accessed January 8, 2015, [http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention\\_agreements/convention\\_declarations.htm#China](http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/convention_declarations.htm#China).



Figure 8. Location of Naturally Occurring Inhabitable Islands in the SCS

Source: Bill Hayton, *The South China Sea: The Struggle for Power in Asia* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2014), xii. Map drawn by IMade Andi Arsana, from the Department of Geodetic and Geomatic Engineering, Faculty of Engineering, Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia.

According to China, the United States is required to obtain approval to operate warships in its territorial seas and China considers the SCS its territorial seas. In fact, in 1992 China passed a law called Territorial Seas and Contiguous Zone, which claimed sovereignty over the SCS and attempted to regulate freedom of navigation by reaffirming China's territorial seas and what other countries can do inside its territorial seas.<sup>81</sup> This law has not been internationally recognized.

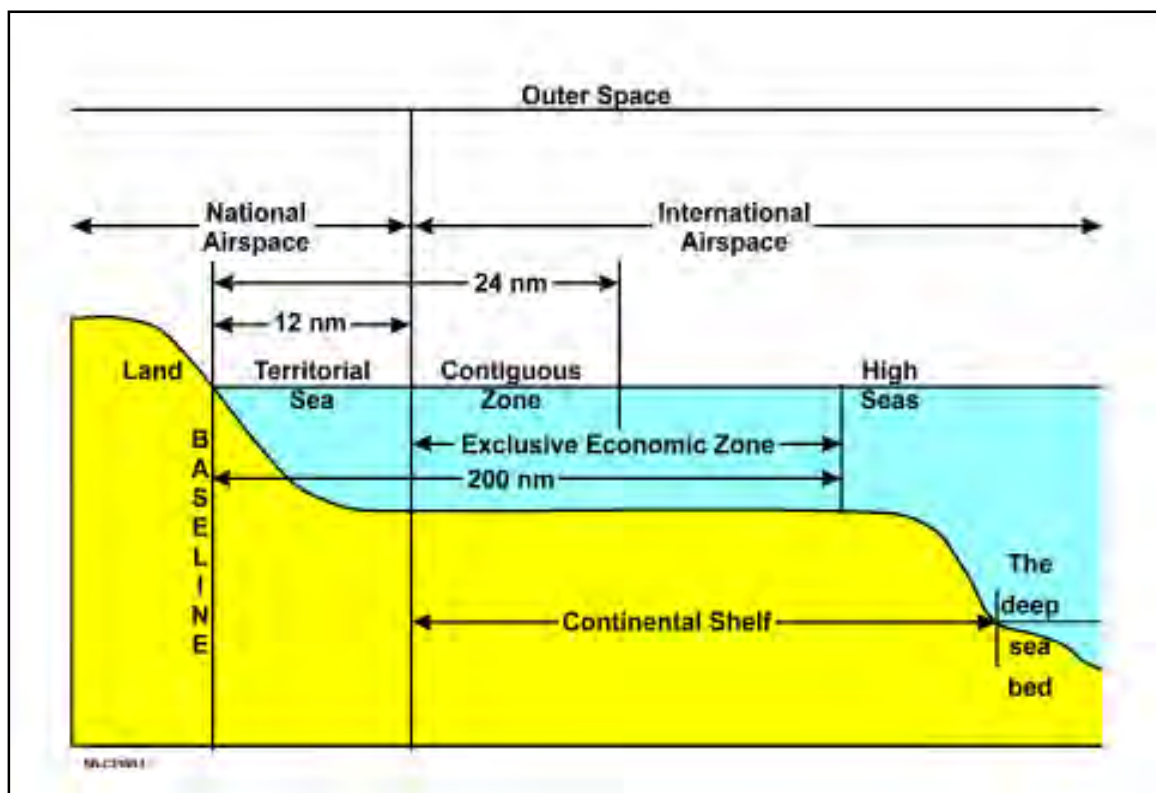


Figure 9. Maritime Zones

Source: Mark E. Rosen, *Challenges to Public Order and the Seas* (Arlington, VA: Center for Naval Analyses, March 2014), 6.

<sup>81</sup> Ronald O'Rourke, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *Maritime Territorial and Exclusive Economic Zone Disputes Involving China: Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2014), 8.

### Other Applicable Legal Efforts

In an effort to prevent disasters at sea, the international community developed the 1972 Multilateral Convention on Preventing Collisions at Sea. The United States, Vietnam, and China are all signatory members of this convention. This convention outlines the rules of the roads for all vessels that operate on the high seas and is a binding agreement.<sup>82</sup> The intent of these rules was to make navigation on the high seas safer. This convention has been violated in recent years by multiple parties in the SCS. Examples of violations are the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) actions towards the USS *COWPENS* and the actions of Chinese and Vietnamese vessels during the 2014 oil rig incident (see Provocations and Challenges in chapter 3 and Appendix B).

In an effort to regulate conduct in the SCS, ASEAN developed the Declaration on Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea in 2002, which was non-binding at the time. The initial agreement was designed to prevent provocations and help solve disagreements through internationally established processes. The 2002 Declaration on Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea did not meet its goal and has done little to improve the conduct in the SCS between all the claimants in the dispute. The next attempt to improve the conduct in the SCS came in 2012, where ASEAN again led the efforts to establish principles for instituting the Declaration on Conduct of the Parties in the South China Sea.<sup>83</sup> This agreement was not ratified. The United States has advocated the development of a binding Code of Conduct in the SCS, but the final text of the code has not been agreed upon, nor is it expected that an agreement would be adhered to by

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<sup>82</sup> O'Rourke, 7.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 11.

China if recent history provides an example. China has refused to negotiate with ASEAN on these issues, preferring to deal with each nation individually, which has effectively prevented ratification of any multinational SCS Code of Conduct.

Pacific naval powers produced the latest multinational agreement concerning operations at sea in 2014. This agreement, called Code for Unplanned Encounters at Sea, is concerned with communication and safety standards and procedures for naval vessels encounters.<sup>84</sup> The United States and China both signed this agreement. This agreement is non-binding and has some weaknesses, especially concerning vessels operating in the SCS. This agreement does not apply to non-naval vessels or procedures inside territorial waters, and therefore, does little to improve encounters in the SCS. China does not believe that this agreement is relevant in the SCS because of its claim of the SCS as Chinese territorial waters and because China extensively uses paramilitary vessels not covered by this agreement.

### Background to the Competing Claims

All the claimants in the current SCS disputes cite historical usage as justification for ownership over disputed areas. The influx of Europeans that colonized the SCS and then the conquest of Japan leading up to World War II further confused the claims to sovereignty in the SCS.<sup>85</sup> Vietnam's historical claim centers on France's activities as the colonial rulers of Vietnam from the mid-1800s until Japan came and conquered the area.

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<sup>84</sup> O'Rourke, 8.

<sup>85</sup> Raine and Le Miere, 36.



China's claim centers on surveys commissioned by the declining Qing Empire in the early 1900s but has also produced evidence from the Ming Dynasty in the 1600s.<sup>86</sup>

The Republic of China (Taiwan) produced one of the earliest post-World War II reassertion of claims in the SCS by producing a map in 1947. This map declared complete sovereignty over the SCS and a dash line map was used to assert the claim. The People's Republic of China adopted this claim in 1949 after the banishment of the Nationalist Chinese to Taiwan (see figure 10).

After World War II, other nations surrounding the SCS also began to assert claims to the numerous islands. The South Vietnamese took control of the western Paracel Islands in 1956 shortly after the French signed the 1954 Geneva Convention. Other countries also became active in pursuing territory. Philippine businessmen began occupying part of the Spratly Islands and Taiwan re-occupied Itu Aba Island.<sup>87</sup> Beginning in the 1970s, countries skirmished for the remaining islands. Twice, China forcefully removed Vietnam from the Paracel Islands. In 1974, during the final stages of the Vietnam War, the PLAN forcefully took possession of part of the Paracel Islands from the South Vietnamese Navy. In 1988, China took the remaining portions of the Paracels from Vietnam and have effectively controlled the island chain ever since.

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<sup>86</sup> Raine and Le Miere, 36.

<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 40.

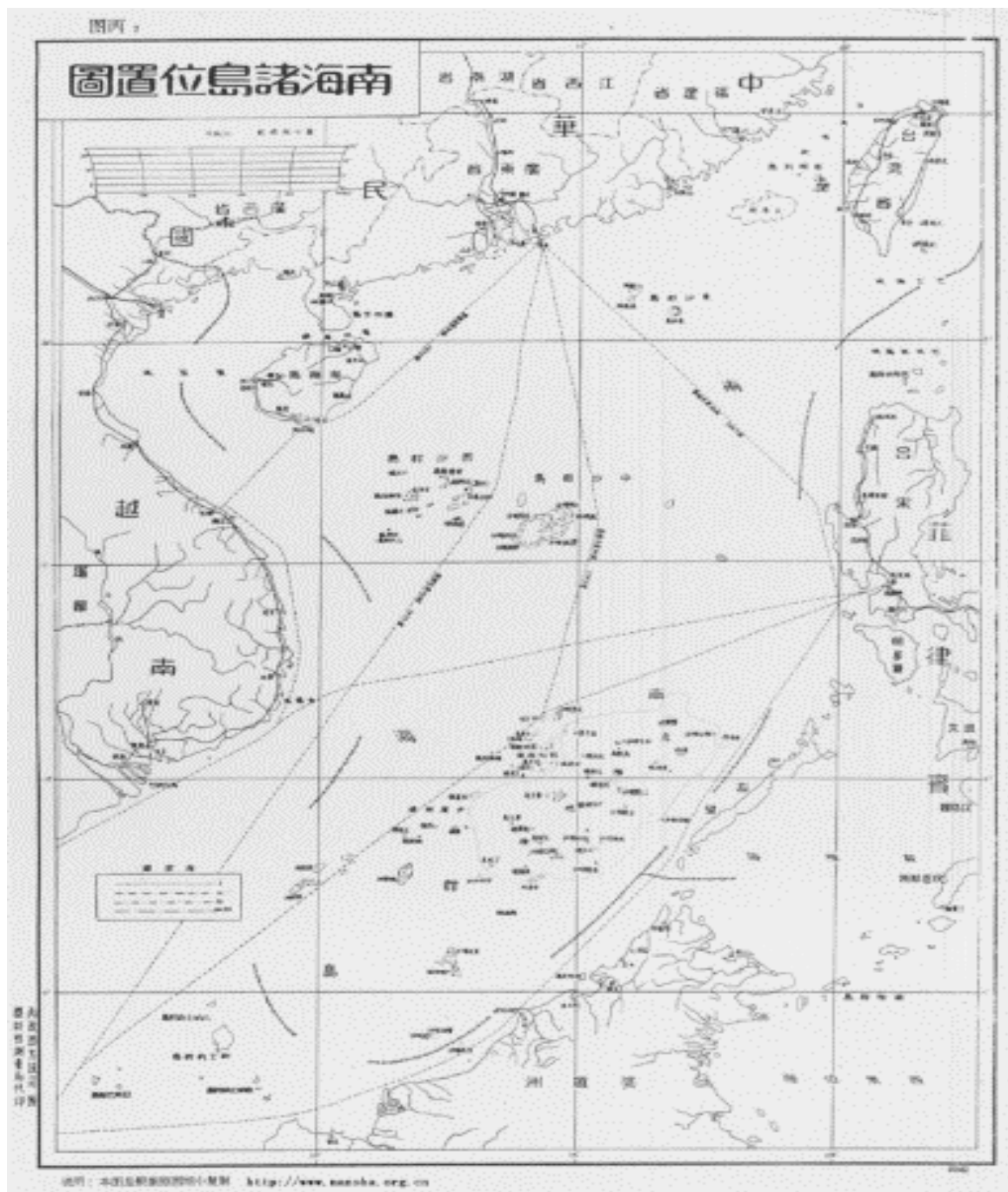


Figure 10. 1947 0 Dash Line Map

Source: J. Bruce Jacobs, "China's Frail Historical Claims to the South China and East China Seas," American Enterprise Institute, June 26, 2014, accessed December 16, 2014, <https://www.aei.org/publication/chinas-frail-historical-claims-to-the-south-china-and-east-china-seas>.

China was not alone in its aggression during this period. Vietnam took the Southwest Cay from the Philippines.<sup>88</sup> In 1979, Malaysia claimed territory in the Spratly Islands and began occupying various reefs in the southern portion of the SCS. In the 1980s, China began its push to control portions of the Spratly Islands. By the 1990s, the scramble for initial reclamation in the SCS had essentially ended and each nation set out to prove its sovereignty to the international community in hope of gaining recognition as the rightful owners.

### The Current State in the Dispute

Today, the competing claims involve the nations of Brunei, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam. Taiwan has adopted a claim identical to China in the SCS. An exception is occupation of islands. Taiwan occupies Itu Abe in the Spratly Islands, the largest naturally occurring island. The territorial disputes in the SCS are centered around three main land formations; the Paracel Islands, claimed by China, Taiwan, and Vietnam; the Spratly Islands, claimed by China, Taiwan, Malaysia, Brunei, the Philippines, and Vietnam (see figure 11); and the Scarborough Shoal, claimed by China and the Philippines.<sup>89</sup> The countries of the SCS also dispute the demarcation line of each other's EEZs. Brunei, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, and Vietnam all have overlapping EEZ claims with other countries (see figure 12).<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Raine and Le Miere, 43.

<sup>89</sup> Council on Foreign Relations, "Mapping the Claims," 2013, accessed November 20, 2014, [http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#!/?cid=otr-marketing\\_use-china\\_sea\\_InfoGuide#contested-waters](http://www.cfr.org/asia-and-pacific/chinas-maritime-disputes/p31345#!/?cid=otr-marketing_use-china_sea_InfoGuide#contested-waters).

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

Table 3. Claims to SCS Islands

<b><u>Territorial Disputes</u></b>		
<b><u>Disputed Islands</u></b>	<b><u>Claimed Sovereignty</u></b>	<b><u>Control</u></b>
Paracel Islands	China, Taiwan, Vietnam	China
Spratly Islands	China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines	China, Taiwan, Vietnam, Malaysia, Philippines
Scarborough Shoal	China, Taiwan, and Philippines	China
<b><u>EEZ Dispute</u></b>		
<b><u>Claimant</u></b>	<b><u>Overlaps With</u></b>	
Brunei	China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam	
China	Brunei, Indonesia <sup>91</sup> , Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan <sup>92</sup> , Vietnam	
Indonesia	China	
Malaysia	Brunei, China, Philippines, Taiwan, Vietnam	
Philippines	Brunei, China, Malaysia, Taiwan, Vietnam	
Taiwan	Brunei, Malaysia, Philippines, China, Vietnam	
Vietnam	Brunei, China, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan	

*Source:* Created by author.

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<sup>91</sup> Not typically shown, however, China's 9 dash line enters into Indonesia's 200-nautical mile EEZ.

<sup>92</sup> Taiwan has an identical EEZ claim as China.



Figure 11. Maritime Disputes in the SCS

*Source:* Scott Sterns, “Is China Overplaying its hand in the South China Sea,” Voice of America, July 27, 2012, accessed December 17, 2014, <http://blogs.voanews.com/state-department-news/2012/07/27/is-china-overplaying-its-hand-in-the-south-china-sea>.

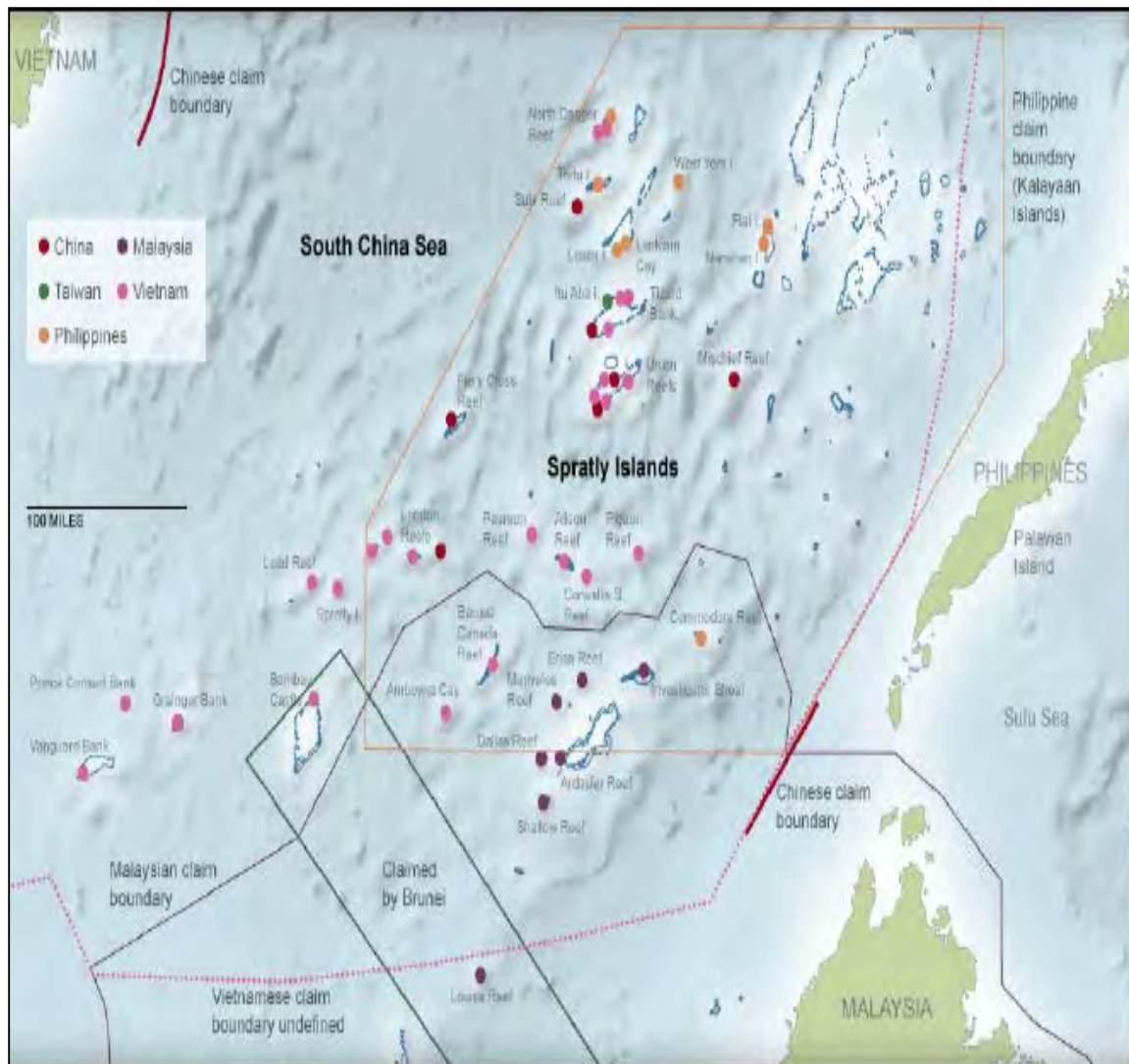


Figure 12. Occupation of the Spratly Islands

Source: U.S. Department of State, "Occupation of the Spratly Islands," *New York Times*, May 31, 2012, in Ben Dolven, Shirley A. Kan, and Mark E. Manyin, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *Maritime Territorial Disputes in East Asia: Issues for Congress* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2013), 10.

## Strategic Direction in the SCS

### U.S. Strategic Direction

The United States has had a history of objectives in the Asia-Pacific. Recently, Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry have expressed those objectives in Asia and the SCS explicitly. The U.S. overarching interest in Asia is the preservation of peace and stability that will allow the advancement of U.S. economic activities in the region and create further opportunities. In terms of the United States in the SCS, the dominant objectives are freedom of navigation for both military and civilian vessels, resolution of claims in a transparent manner according to international law, and freedom to exercise sovereignty over EEZs according to the UNCLOS.<sup>93</sup>

Given the importance of China to the United States, the 2015 NSS provides objectives for US-CN relations. These objectives are to develop a constructive relationship, cooperate on shared regional and global challenges, monitor China's military modernization, and seek ways to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or miscalculation. A Center of Naval Analyses study by Michael McDevitt, summarized U.S. policy concerning the SCS as follows:

- No use of force or coercion by any of the claimants to resolve sovereignty disputes or change the status quo of disputed South China Sea features.
- Freedom of navigation, which includes unimpeded lawful navigation for commercial, private, and military vessels and aircraft. Coastal states must respect the UNCLOS language that all "high seas freedoms" are applicable to military operations in the EEZs of coastal states.
- All maritime entitlements to any of the waters of the South China Sea must be based on international law and must be derived from land

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<sup>93</sup> McDevitt, VI.

features in the South China Sea. China's nine-dash line does not meet these criteria. In short, only land (islands and rocks) generate maritime zones.

- The United States takes no position on the relative merits of competing sovereignty claims. It does not choose sides; nor does it favor one country's claim over another's.
- An effective Code of Conduct that would promote a rules-based framework for managing and regulating the behavior of relevant countries in the South China Sea is essential. A key part of such a document would be mechanisms such as hotlines and emergency procedures for preventing incidents in sensitive areas and managing them when they do occur in ways that prevent disputes from escalating.
- The United States supports internationally recognized dispute resolution mechanisms, including those provided for in the UNCLOS treaty.
- Washington will respond positively to small South China Sea littoral countries that are US allies, officially designated "strategic partners," or "comprehensive partners," who want to improve their ability to patrol and monitor their own territorial waters and EEZs.<sup>94</sup>
- The United States Government wants to improve access for U.S. military in areas proximate to the South China Sea.<sup>95</sup>

The Congressional Research Service, in its published report on U.S. policy, reached very similar conclusions as the Center for Naval Analyses. The notable additions are:

- Parties should avoid taking provocative or unilateral actions that disrupt the status quo or jeopardize peace and security.

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<sup>94</sup> Vietnam was designated as a comprehensive partner in July 2013. The element of this comprehensive partnership is maritime capacity building, economic engagement, climate change and environmental issues, education cooperation, and promoting respect for human rights. U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership," U.S. Department of State, December 16, 2013, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/218734.htm>.

<sup>95</sup> McDevitt, 64.



- U.S. military surveillance flights in international airspace above another country's EEZ are lawful under international law, and the United States plans to continue conducting these flights as it has in the past.<sup>96</sup>

A key take away from an analysis of U.S. policy in the SCS is that the United States desires that disputes be resolved legally and peacefully according to international law. Also, U.S. ability to operate freely in international waters is a high priority. Policy further supports the U.S. continued ability to influence activities in the region and reflects U.S. current initiatives to rebalance towards Asia.

### Vietnam's Strategic Direction

Vietnam, like China, is a socialist country with a controlling Communist political party that also uses a capitalist economic model. Its purpose is described in the last paragraph of the Preamble of its Constitution:

In the light of Marxism-Leninism and Ho Chi Minh's thought, carrying into effect the Programme of National Construction in the period of transition to socialism, the Vietnamese people vow to unite millions as one, uphold the spirit of self-reliance in building the country, carry out a foreign policy of independence, sovereignty, peace, friendship and cooperation with all nations, strictly abide by the Constitution, and win ever greater successes in their effort to renovate, build and defend their motherland.<sup>97</sup>

Similar to Vietnam's national character, its national purpose stresses its independence and self-reliance, reflecting years of struggle against dominant world powers. As opposed to China and the United States, the SCS represents Vietnam's only access to the oceans of the world. Therefore, Vietnam's interest in SCS is vital to its

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<sup>96</sup> O'Rourke, 21.

<sup>97</sup> Socialist Republic of Vietnam, *The National Assembly of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam*, January 12, 2008, accessed March 26, 2015, <http://www.na.gov.vn/htx/English/C1479/default.asp?Newid=24781#KIhp6BxRzNUI>.

national security. Vietnam's interests in the SCS are similar to that of China's, where it desires sovereignty according to international laws, security and stability, and access to resources.

One of Vietnam's objectives is to gain international recognition for its territorial claims. It attempts to gain recognition through the UN and other international and regional organizations by expanding its diplomatic network, hoping to internationalize the issues and to gain a united front of nations opposed to China's claim in the SCS. Gaining a united front has been a difficult task. Vietnam vigorously attempted to highlight the issues and unite claimants against China in 2010 when it was leading the ASEAN Summit, but a lack of consensus within ASEAN prevented the attainment of those goals.

In order to ensure security and stability, Vietnam has also sought strong regional partners that will act as a counter balance in the region to China's strength. To gain access to the resources in the region, Vietnam has worked with foreign energy firms that have exploited the resources within Vietnam's EEZ, a move that has triggered a negative response from China. Vietnam has tied its future economic growth with access and control over the resources of the sea. Vietnam's long-term economic objective for the SCS is to exploit the natural resource to eventually provide sixty percent of its total economic output by 2025.<sup>98</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Pierre Tran, "Vietnam has much at Stake in S. China Sea," U.S. Department of Defense, March 28, 2015, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2015/03/28/france/70447536>.

## China's Strategic Direction

The continuance of the Chinese Communist Party rule is the purpose of the Chinese government.<sup>99</sup> This depiction of purpose is evident in the People's Republic of China's Preamble to the Constitution, which was amended on March 29, 1993 to state:

The basic task before the nation is the concentration of efforts of socialist modernization construction in accordance with the theory of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. Under the leadership of the Communist Party of China and the guidance of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, the Chinese people of all nationalities will continue to adhere to the people's democratic dictatorship and the socialist road and to uphold reform and opening to the outside world, steadily improve socialist institutions, develop socialist democracy, improve the socialist legal system, and work hard and self-reliantly to modernize the country's industry, agriculture, national defense and science and technology step by step to build China into a strong, prosperous culturally advances[sic], democratic socialist nation.<sup>100</sup>

China is a diverse nation that requires stability in order to continue the economic development that is key to the existence of the Communist Party. In order to maintain stability, China has worked towards the improvement of its citizens' standard of living. This improvement has required sustained economic growth, which in turn has resulted in China's growing global economic interests. Few regions are as important to China's economic interests as the SCS. The sea-lane, the security buffer, and the potential for a secure energy source are why the SCS is a core interest of China. Therefore, China's

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<sup>99</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 15.

<sup>100</sup> International Human Rights Treaties and Documents Database, *Amendments to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China*, Hong Kong Human Rights Monitor, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://www.hkhrm.org.hk/english/law/const12.html>.

interests in the SCS can be summarized as sovereignty over territory, stability of the vital sea-lane, and resources contained in the SCS.<sup>101</sup>

The objectives to attain those interests are recognition of sovereignty of its 9 dash line; security of the SCS sea-lane; control of access to the SCS; and recognized rights to oil and natural gas contained in the SCS. Chinese policy in the SCS has been a point of confusion for some. China has refused to arbitrate disputes and ratify a code of conduct for the SCS with ASEAN. China seems to have shifted policy towards a more assertive stance since 2010. This is evident by its more frequent provocative actions with other nations in the SCS. In 1996, China ratified the UNCLOS, but makes claims that are counter to the principles of that convention.<sup>102</sup> China states its policy of “peaceful development.”<sup>103</sup> A policy that seems to be incongruent with China’s recent actions in the SCS. However, because China believes that its territorial claims are absolute, protecting territory from other claimants does not contradict its claim of peaceful development.<sup>104</sup>

China has a policy to expand its regional influence and leadership in the SCS. These efforts have been evident in its interaction and leadership efforts in regional organizations such as ASEAN +3 and the East Asian Summit, organizations that initially

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<sup>101</sup> McDevitt, 32.

<sup>102</sup> Ryan Santicola, “China’s Consistently Inconsistent South China Sea Policy,” *The Diplomat*, May 24, 2014, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/chinas-consistently-inconsistent-south-china-sea-policy>.

<sup>103</sup> Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of India, *White Paper: China’s Peaceful Development*, The People’s Republic of China, accessed May 19, 2015, <http://in.chineseembassy.org/eng/zt/peaceful/t855717.htm>.

<sup>104</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, “China’s ‘Peaceful Rise’ and the South China Sea,” *The Diplomat*, May 17, 2014, accessed March 25, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/05/chinas-peaceful-rise-and-the-south-china-sea>.

excluded the United States.<sup>105</sup> China's military has also attempted to expand China's regional influence by increasing military engagements in the SCS.<sup>106</sup> China's expanding regional influences could help sway policy decisions of others and diminish U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific.

### Diplomatic Relationships

#### US-VN Relations

The relationship between the United States and Vietnam is not as long and contentious as the relationship between China and Vietnam. The United States fought communist Vietnamese forces during the Cold War over political and ideological differences. The United States wanted to prevent the further spread of communism into South Vietnam. The United States feared that if North and South Vietnam united under a communist government then this victory would start a domino effect that would spread communism throughout Southeast Asia. The United States supported South Vietnam's fight with the communist North Vietnamese as a way to balance the power in the region, in response to the growing communist influence of the People's Republic of China.<sup>107</sup> Although that ideological fight has passed, the Vietnam War was a powerful event that has shaped both nations' modern day identity. Since the end of the Cold War, the United

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<sup>105</sup> The United States was later included in the East Asian Summit, first represented in 2010. Robert G. Sutter, *The United States in Asia* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 112.

<sup>106</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 1.

<sup>107</sup> Roger Buckley, *The United States in the Asia-Pacific since 1945* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 140.

States and Vietnam have slowly developed closer political and diplomatic ties. In 1995, President Clinton normalized relations between the two countries after a twenty-year break following the conclusion of the Vietnam War.

Lately, the United States and Vietnam have converging interests. Vietnam's interests are in securing relationships with strong powers to balance China's power and internationalize its territorial disputes. The United States is interested in maintaining its influence in the Asia-Pacific and in retaining freedom of navigation in the SCS.<sup>108</sup> This convergence of interests, among other things, has dramatically improved relations between the two countries since the end of the Vietnam War. There are numerous examples that show the expanding US-VN relationship. One example is the Lower Mekong Initiative that was created in 2009. This initiative came to signify, to many, the beginning of the US-VN partnership. The Lower Mekong Initiative, involving the countries of the United States, Vietnam, Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, and later Burma, enhances cooperation in the areas of environment, health, education, and infrastructure development.<sup>109</sup>

In the 2010 QDR, the United States named Vietnam as a target for a new strategic relationship.<sup>110</sup> Economically, Vietnam has signed on to be a member of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, which is the cornerstone of the Obama Administration's economic

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<sup>108</sup> Luttwak, 163.

<sup>109</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Lower Mekong Initiative," accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/p/eap/mekong>.

<sup>110</sup> Secretary of Defense, *Quadrennial Defense Review* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2010), 59.

policy in the Asia-Pacific.<sup>111</sup> Other trade initiatives are under negotiation, such as a Bilateral Investment Treaty and a Free Trade Agreement as part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Vietnam has applied to the U.S General Systems of Preference Program, which provides duty free tariff on imports of developing countries.<sup>112</sup> In 2013, President Obama designated Vietnam a comprehensive partner, which is described by the State Department as a framework for advancing bilateral relationships in areas of concern between the two countries.<sup>113</sup>

Military engagements have steadily increased between the United States and Vietnam. Initially, after the normalization of relations with Vietnam, the military-to-military exchanges dealt with issues still lingering from the Vietnam War, such as missing in action recovery, unexploded ordinance removal, and dealing with the aftermath of chemical weapons, such as Agent Orange.<sup>114</sup> More recently, military engagement has shifted to more contemporary security concerns. In 2005, Vietnam signed the International Military Education & Training and Foreign Military Sales Agreements, paving the way for Vietnamese officers to train at the U.S. Army Command

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<sup>111</sup> Office of the United State Trade Representative, “Overview of the Trans-Pacific Partnership,” Executive Office of the President, accessed March 30, 2015, <https://ustr.gov/tpp/overview-of-the-TPP>.

<sup>112</sup> Manyin, 13.

<sup>113</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, “U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership,” U.S. Department of State, December 16, 2013, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/218734.htm>.

<sup>114</sup> Manyin, 22.

and General Staff Officers Course.<sup>115</sup> In 2010, direct military-to-military defense dialogue began, and now Vietnam and the United States regularly conduct combined naval exercises, U.S. naval port visits to Cam Ranh Bay, and officer exchanges.<sup>116</sup> The Vietnamese began to purchase non-lethal military supplies in 2014, further solidifying the budding security partnership that has formed in recent years between the two nations.<sup>117</sup>

Despite steadily improving U.S. interactions with Vietnam, the issue of human rights has been a roadblock for further development of relations. The United States has expressed concern over Vietnam's suppression of certain religions, press freedoms, treatment of ethnic minorities, workers' rights, and human trafficking. Human rights issues have especially been disruptive to the advancement of trade treaties since the U.S. Congress has moved to block those agreements, and even proposed a Vietnam Human Rights Act.<sup>118</sup> In the twenty years that have passed since the United States normalized relations with Vietnam, the diplomatic ties, economic integration, and military-to-military engagements have advanced significantly. There are still differences between the two nations, but the possibility of further advancement of diplomatic, economic, and military relations exists.

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<sup>115</sup> U.S. Department of State, "Defense Cooperation in Vietnam Fact Sheet," accessed March 30, 2015, <http://photos.state.gov/libraries/vietnam/8621/pdf-forms/15anniv-DAO-Factsheet.pdf>.

<sup>116</sup> Manyin, 22.

<sup>117</sup> U.S. Department of State, Office of the Spokesperson, "U.S.-Vietnam Comprehensive Partnership."

<sup>118</sup> Manyin, 21.



## US-CN Relations

During World War II, the United States allied with the Chinese against a Japan that threatened to dominate the entire Asia-Pacific region. After World War II, Mao Zedong led a successful revolution overthrowing the U.S. supported Nationalist Chinese government. The Nationalist Chinese fled to Taiwan in 1949 and the United States continued to recognize the government in Taipei as the legitimate authority in China. During the early part of the Cold War, the U.S. relationship with the Communist government on mainland China deteriorated further. The Chinese People's Volunteers met UN forces led by the United States in battle on the Korean Peninsula in October 1950 after UN forces approached the Chinese-North Korean border along the Yalu River after crossing the 38th parallel in September 1950. The conflict ended in a stalemate because of China's intervention and greatly damaged the US-CN relationship.

In the early 1970s, the relationship between the United States and China began to improve when President Richard Nixon began officially communicating with the PRC after a foundation of communication was laid by Henry Kissinger. In 1971, the PRC gained the Chinese seat at the UN Security Council without much of a reaction from the United States. The United States switched its official recognition to Beijing from Taipei in 1979 and fully normalized its relationship with the PRC. In the same year, the United States ended its official diplomatic relationship with the Republic of China's government in Taiwan. However, the United States signed the Taiwan Relations Act that helped to assure Taiwan's security against the PRC. The U.S. support of Taiwan has been a point of contention between the two countries ever since.

Zhu argues in his book *U.S.-China Relations in the 21st Century, Power Transition and Peace*, that the tension stems from the rebalancing of power away from the United States and more towards a multipolar world where the United States is the dominant power in the Western Hemisphere and China in the Eastern Hemisphere. A relatively new source of tension is China's efforts to decrease U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific.

The latest NSS also discussed U.S. concern with China's unwillingness to arbitrate with world bodies concerning disputes with other nations. The U.S State Department says, "The United States seeks to build a positive, cooperative, and comprehensive relationship with China by expanding areas of cooperation and addressing areas of disagreement, such as human rights and cyber security. The United States welcomes a strong, peaceful, and prosperous China playing a greater role in world affairs and seeks to advance practical cooperation with China."<sup>119</sup> According to China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "relations between the People's Republic of China and the United States of America maintained [sic] steady and positive growth in general."<sup>120</sup> China then provided an extensive list of cooperative efforts between the two nations. China identified the main US-CN disagreements on concerns over Taiwan, Tibet,

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<sup>119</sup> U.S. Department of State, Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs, "U.S. Relationship with China," U.S. Department of State, January 21, 2015, accessed March 30, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/ei/bgn/18902.htm>.

<sup>120</sup> Ministry of Foreign Affairs of The People's Republic of China, "China and the United States of America," The People's Republic of China, accessed March 30, 2015, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/wjb\\_663304/zzjg\\_663340/bmdyzs\\_664814/gjlb\\_664818/3432\\_664920](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjb_663304/zzjg_663340/bmdyzs_664814/gjlb_664818/3432_664920).

Xinjiang, trade, human rights, and religion. China accuses the United States of fabricating claims and meddling in its internal affairs on these issues.

Both China and the United States realize the importance of good relations between the two nations.<sup>121</sup> Globalization and the economic interconnectivity, make conflict between China and the United States inexcusably costly and detrimental to the world. Knowing this, Chinese President Xi Jinping expressed his desire to build strategic trust between the two nations on his recent visit with the Obama Administration at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation meeting.<sup>122</sup> In 2013, President Obama concluded that China and the United States should continue to work on a “new model” for its relationship and seek areas of cooperation, proper management of differences, and expanded trust through dialogue.<sup>123</sup> As both sides work to improve trust, each must be careful not to further escalate tensions between the two nations.

One possible point where tensions may escalate between US-CN is in the SCS. In the SCS, some believe the best characterization of the US-CN relationship is that of adversaries. Since 2000, naval incidents between the two nations have led to a periodic escalation of tensions.<sup>124</sup> Both nations disagree on how the other should operate in the

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<sup>121</sup> Zhu, 172.

<sup>122</sup> Allison Szalwinski, *Building Strategic Trust in the U.S.-China Relationship, An Interview with Paul Haenly* (Seattle, WA: National Bureau of Asian Research, November 2014), accessed 6 November 2014, [http://nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/psa/Haenle\\_interview\\_110614.pdf](http://nbr.org/downloads/pdfs/psa/Haenle_interview_110614.pdf).

<sup>123</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, II.

<sup>124</sup> Appendix B contains a list of SCS incidents since 1974 that show points where tensions were raised between the United States and China.

SCS. The United States does not recognize the legality of China's 9 dash line and China does not recognize the U.S. right to navigate freely in the SCS. As Kaplan pointed out, China has ratified the UNCLOS, but does not adhere to it, while the United States adheres to the UNCLOS, but has not ratified it.<sup>125</sup> These two conflicting interests have put the two powerful nations at odds and has heightened the risk of conflict based on miscalculations.

### China and Vietnam (CN-VN) Relations

At certain points in history, CN-VN relations have been contentious. Starting around 100 B.C, China dominated Vietnam for nearly 900 years.<sup>126</sup> China has always viewed Vietnam as one of its tributary states; a view that Vietnam vigorously detests. For a time during the Cold War, CN-VN relations improved because of China's support of North Vietnam's struggle against the French, South Vietnamese, and the United States.<sup>127</sup> Recent events have heightened tensions, and the majority of the current tensions between the two nations originate from territorial disputes.

The modern low point in relations between the two countries was in 1979, when China invaded Vietnam's northern border with 250,000 troops.<sup>128</sup> This invasion was in part a response to Vietnam's military action against Cambodia, an ally of China. The goal

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<sup>125</sup> Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 173.

<sup>126</sup> Bellacqua, 8.

<sup>127</sup> Mark E. Manyin, Congressional Research Service Report for Congress, *U.S.-Vietnam Relations in 2014: Current Issues and implications for U.S. Policy* (Washington, DC: Library of Congress, 2014), 28.

<sup>128</sup> Luttwax, 46.

of China was to force Vietnam to withdraw from Cambodia. Although the Chinese operation only lasted a few weeks, the Chinese forces experienced considerable losses. Disputes over the land border between Vietnam and China continued after the war. It was not until 1999 that the location of the border was agreed upon and the physical demarcation took until 2009 to complete.<sup>129</sup>

Following that war, China and Vietnam did not normalize relations until 1991. Currently, CN-VN relations are sometimes tense, especially over issues in the SCS; but Vietnam is careful to maintain a generally good relationship with China, as a matter of survival and continued development. Given Vietnam's geographic proximity to China, political leaders and foreign officials strive to maintain good relations with China. Vietnam does not have an ocean, or even a sea, between it and China, as do other nations in the dispute, which makes having positive relations all the more important for Vietnam's stability. Vietnam's economy is also dependent on China. The Vietnamese imports more goods from China than from any of its other trading partners.<sup>130</sup>

In dealing with the disputes in the SCS, whatever security strategies Vietnam chooses to implement, its leaders must consider the implication on its relations with China. Vietnam strives for a good relationship with China, despite the contentious history, recent tensions, and Vietnam's national identity linked to resistance to China. China is vital to the continued prosperity of the Vietnamese people and Vietnam will not act without significant provocation in a way that risks that relationship.

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>130</sup> Kaplan, "The Vietnam Solution," 5.

## Current Strategies

### United States: Soft Containment

Some argue that the goal of the U.S. Soft Containment Strategy is to prevent the further spread of Chinese influence in Asia-Pacific.<sup>131</sup> The perception in China is that containment, even if named a pivot toward the Asia-Pacific, is the strategy of the United States in the Asia-Pacific. Looking at U.S. treaties and bases available to U.S. forces in the Asia-Pacific, it is hard to refute an accusation of a U.S. containment strategy. To China's northeast, the United States has defense treaties with Japan and South Korea and those two countries are home to the bulk of U.S. military power in Asia-Pacific. To China's east, the United States has supported Japan's claim to the Senkaku Islands. To China's southeast, the United States has a defense treaty with the Philippines. To the far south of China, the United States has a defense treaty with Australia and plans to rotate Marines in there. In the near south, the United States has supported the strengthening of ASEAN, developed comprehensive partnerships with Indonesia and Vietnam, increased presence and patrols in the SCS, and has sought stronger relations with Malaysia. The United States has also sought to develop deeper relations with India. In the western part of China, the United States has tacitly supported the Tibetan struggle by hosting the Dalai Lama. Further to the west of China, the United States is deeply involved militarily in Afghanistan. Given all these actions that geographically circle China, it is easy to see a *de facto* containment strategy at play.

The goal of the U.S. strategy in the SCS is to ensure freedom of navigation. As part of that strategy, the United States considers the SCS a global commons. It is a core

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<sup>131</sup> Doyle.

objective to safeguard and protect access, and the use of armed forces to retain freedom of navigation could be expected.<sup>132</sup> The United States also seeks security partners in the SCS region to help further its objectives. The United States has deepened its involvement in multinational organizations in the region and has encouraged all the parties in the disputes to seek resolution through established international procedures that deal with conflict between nations, such as the UN.

#### Vietnam: Counter Balance

Vietnam's SCS strategy seeks resolution through international institutions and to counter balance China's power. In its efforts to seek resolution through international institutions, Vietnam is working closely with ASEAN and other multinational organizations to show that it is committed to resolve the disputes with China legally. In 2009, it co-signed a letter with Malaysia that outlined the disputes and requested arbitration from the UN. Vietnam knew that China would refuse arbitration, but the purpose of the letter was to gain further international awareness and support for its efforts.

The second aspect of Vietnam's SCS strategy is to create a balance of power in the SCS. China has far more military power than the other Asian nations. To balance the power, Vietnam has sought to create security relationships while upgrading its own military capabilities. Vietnam's top choices for security relationships are the United States and India. These two nations could influence China's action in the SCS, and help shape a more favorable outcome for Vietnam. Vietnam has also sought to strengthen its

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<sup>132</sup> U.S. President, *Sustaining U.S Global Leadership*, 3.

military, especially in the maritime and air domains. Russian-made equipment still makes up the bulk of the military equipment in Vietnam, but Vietnam is turning more towards the west for military procurement than previously.

### China: Salami Slicing

China's strategy in the SCS, nicknamed Salami Slicing by outside observers, has been effective thus far in meeting China's goals in the SCS. The goal of China's Salami Slicing strategy is to establish more credible forces than the other claimants can hope to match and to give China legal credibility for its claims in the SCS.<sup>133</sup> China only deals bilaterally with nations concerning territorial dispute. Using incremental steps, China seeks to change the conditions on the ground with the goal of creating *de facto* conditions of control over time. China puts the onus on the other countries to indirectly counter its efforts. Few nations have been effective at opposing China's actions in the SCS. One example of this is China's establishment of Sansha City on Woody Island in the Paracels.<sup>134</sup> China created Sansha City as a military garrison that has the capability to protect its claims. Woody Island is symbolic in the struggle for sovereignty in the SCS; China forcefully seized the island from South Vietnam in 1974.<sup>135</sup> Incremental steps in China's Salami Slicing strategy, rarely garner a response from other claimants. Over

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<sup>133</sup> Robert Haddick, *Fire on the Water* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2014), 80.

<sup>134</sup> BBC News, "China Approves Military Garrison for Disputed Island," July 23, 2012, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-18949941>.

<sup>135</sup> Robert Haddick, "Salami Slicing in the SCS: China's Slow, Patient Approach to Dominating Asia," *Foreign Policy*, August 2, 2012, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://foreignpolicy.com/2012/08/03/salami-slicing-in-the-south-china-sea>.



time, China's actions in the SCS amount to seizing territory and exercising greater control piece-by-piece. China claims the SCS as part of its sovereign territory and that the sea is vital to its national security and a lifeline for its economic prosperity.<sup>136</sup> China does not often use the PLAN but uses the Chinese Marine Surveillance unit. The Chinese Marine Surveillance unit is a maritime law enforcement agency of China that is made of three fleets of patrol vessels that monitor Chinese territorial waters. In the SCS, the Chinese Marine Surveillance unit regularly conducts armed patrols and monitors the disputed islands, which has helped China to established greater control over the disputed area. If China continues to be successful implementing its Salami Slicing strategy, U.S. freedom of navigation in the SCS could be at risk.

#### Provocations and Challenges

Recently, there has been a recognizable uptick in provocations in the SCS by all parties involved. There are many reasons why, but primarily this uptick is a result of a more assertive China and an ever-increasing density of vessels operating in the SCS. The seizure of fishing vessels in the open waters of the SCS has been a common occurrence. A recent example is the May 2014 incident where a Philippine vessel seized a Chinese fishing boat and eleven crewmembers near the Spratly Islands.<sup>137</sup> The Philippine military

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<sup>136</sup> Li Yan, *The Global Commons and the Restructure of Sino-US Military Relations* (Stockholm, Sweden: Institute for Security and Development Policy, 2012), 7, accessed March 8, 2015, [http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2012\\_li-yan\\_the-global-commons.pdf](http://www.isdp.eu/images/stories/isdp-main-pdf/2012_li-yan_the-global-commons.pdf).

<sup>137</sup> Nguyen Phuong Lihn and Michael Martina, "South China Sea Tensions Rise as Vietnam says China Rammed Ships," *Reuters*, May 7, 2014, accessed December 31, 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2014/05/07/us-china-seas-fishermen-idUSBREA4603C20140507>.

seized the boat because it had 500 protected turtles on board bound for China. The Chinese immediately demanded the fisherman's release. In July of 2014, the Chinese seized a Vietnamese fishing boat with a crew of six that were operating in the Gulf of Tonkin, an area that has an established agreement on its use between Vietnam and China. In 2015, the Chinese Coast Guard rammed three Philippine fishing boats operating in the same area. These incidents highlight how increased competition over resources in the SCS could lead to conflict. China has also been guilty of seizing other nation's fishing vessels.

The territorial disputes have made it a challenge for any nation to benefit economically from the abundant resources in the SCS. For example, exploration in the SCS is difficult because most of the proven energy reserves lie in disputed areas; therefore, attempts at exploration of these resources risks a response. Of the most contested island chains, the Spratly Islands, have the most potential for undiscovered energy resources. In 1970, the Philippine government found natural gas around the Spratly Islands and contracted companies from the United States and the United Kingdom to extract the resource. Ultimately, Chinese objections prevented exploitation of this site.<sup>138</sup>

Vietnam has taken steps to develop offshore energy resources by working with foreign firms, including U.S. oil companies. Vietnam's relationship with foreign oil companies has triggered a response from China, who warns of unspecified consequences

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<sup>138</sup> U.S. Energy Information Administration, "South China Sea," 3.

for a company that develops energy resources in disputed waters in the SCS.<sup>139</sup> The presence of U.S. oil companies in the SCS increases the U.S. desire for stability and heightens concerns of both Chinese and U.S. involvement in the region.

#### US-CN incidents

Several incidents have occurred at sea between the PLAN and U.S. Navy. One of the first high profile incidents occurred in 2001. A U.S. reconnaissance aircraft and a Chinese fighter jet collided near Hainan Island. In 2002, PLAN vessels harassed the USNS *Bowditch* and forced it to leave the Yellow Sea. In 2009, another incident occurred involving the USNS *Impeccable*. In this incident, Chinese fishing vessels and PLAN aircraft and frigates continually harassed and blocked the path of the USNS *Impeccable* operating in the SCS, even trying to cut the USNS *Impeccable*'s sonar array. Following the same pattern as the USNS *Impeccable* incident, the PLAN harassed the USNS *Victorious* in May 2009.

Another example that supports the assertion that China has shifted policy towards a more militarily assertive stance was a December 2013 incident involving the guided missile cruiser, USS *Cowpens*.<sup>140</sup> In this incident, the USS *Cowpens* was following and observing the Chinese *Liaoning* Carrier Group in the SCS. The Carrier Group signaled for the USS *Cowpens* to leave the area, but the USS *Cowpens* refused the request. Subsequently, a Chinese Amphibious ship stopped 500 meters in front and in the path of

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<sup>139</sup> International Crisis Group, "Stirring up the South China Sea (II): Regional Responses," 3.

<sup>140</sup> See Chapter 3 under Competing Claims for an extensive list of provocations in the SCS between the China and the United States, including the 2009 incident involving the USS *Impeccable*.

the USS *Cowpens*, forcing evasive maneuvers.<sup>141</sup> This maneuver by the Chinese vessel was risky and counter to accepted maritime operations and international laws of operation in the high seas. In 2014, aggressive maneuvers by a Chinese J-11B fighter came within close proximity to a U.S. Navy P-8A surveillance aircraft operating east of Hainan Island.<sup>142</sup> These incidents are concerning because they are occurring more frequently and show that China is more assertive in obstructing U.S. Pacific Fleet operations in the SCS.<sup>143</sup> China obstructs U.S. operations because it wants to prevent U.S. intelligence gathering and counter U.S. surveillance activity of its military capabilities in the SCS. Some interpret China's actions as preventing U.S. freedom of navigation in the SCS.

#### Provocations between China and Vietnam

A recent incident highlighting the conflict between China and Vietnam occurred on May 1, 2014. A Chinese fleet of civilian and naval vessels escorting an oil exploration platform moved within 120 nautical miles of Vietnam's shore, well within Vietnam's EEZ, but within Chinese claimed waters (see figure 13). Vietnamese ships met the Chinese fleet, and the opposing sides began ramming each other's vessels and shooting water cannons. In Vietnam, massive anti-Chinese protests erupted around Chinese owned

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<sup>141</sup> Carl Thayer, "USS Cowpens Incident Revels Strategic Mistrust between U.S. and China," *The Diplomat*, December 17, 2013, accessed February 12, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/uss-cowpens-incident-reveals-strategic-mistrust-between-u-s-and-china>.

<sup>142</sup> Christopher P. Cavas, "Chinese Fighter Buzzes US Patrol Aircraft," U.S. Department of Defense, August 22, 2014, accessed January 8, 2015, <http://archive.defensenews.com/article/20140822/DEFREG02/308220025/Chinese-Fighter-Buzzes-US-Patrol-Aircraft>.

<sup>143</sup> See Appendix B for a list of events in the SCS.

factories. The protests led to the death of twenty-one people, mostly ethnic Chinese factory workers. The fleet and oil platforms eventually departed in July 2014, after two months in Vietnam's EEZ, with China claiming to have completed its purpose.



Figure 13. Site of the Contested Chinese Oil Rig off the Coast of Vietnam

Source: Brian Spegele and Vu Trong Khanh, "China Moves Oil Rig from Contested Waters," *The Wall Street Journal*, July 16, 2014, accessed March 8, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/chinas-cosl-moves-oil-rig-from-contested-waters-1405472611>.

## Asian Arms Race

The competing claims in the SCS have raised the risk of armed conflict in the region and resulted in an unofficial arms race.<sup>144</sup> Much of the increase in military spending in Asia is allocated towards capabilities in the maritime domain, reflecting the geography of the region and the location of many of the security concerns.<sup>145</sup> Military spending increased dramatically across Asia from 2010-2014, increasing over twenty-eight percent in the four years and a total dollar amount increase of over \$344 billion.<sup>146</sup> The largest increases in East Asia came from the sub region of Southeast Asia, which includes many of the countries that border the SCS. Vietnam's military procurement has centered on improving its naval capability, most notably, purchases of six Kilo-class submarines, upgraded naval patrol vessels, and reconnaissance aircraft. In terms of overall spending, China spends the most on its defense out of all the nations in Asia. Military expenditures reflect the security concerns of a nation. The Asian arms race increases the amount of military equipment that could potentially operate in the SCS and increases the risk of tactical miscalculation that could have strategic consequences.

## Miscalculation: A Threat to Stability

All the nations that operate militarily in the SCS face the threat of miscalculation that leads to conflict. The SCS is congested with military, paramilitary, and commercial

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<sup>144</sup> East Asia is defined according to Robert D. Kaplan in the book *Asia's Cauldron* as containing Northeast Asia (Japan, China, North and South Korea) and Southeast Asia (dominated by the South China Sea). Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 8. East Asia is also defined in the Glossary this paper. See also Doyle.

<sup>145</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 207-302.

<sup>146</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

vessels and aircraft. Numerous nations have economic interests in the region and competing powers regularly come into contact in the SCS. China's Salami Slicing strategy especially risks a miscalculation by taking incremental action to gain control over time. These actions may result in a military response if China does not properly assess the situation. States go to war for numerous reasons, and the SCS territorial disputes risks escalation of tensions from powers attempting to assert its claims.

### The Adversarial Force

In this research, China is the adversarial force. The first reason is that all the disputes in the SCS involve China. Many of the other claimants, especially within ASEAN, have worked together in an effort to negotiate with China from a stronger position. China has refused to negotiate the disputes through multinational organizations. As part of its strategy, China desires bilateral discussions with each of the other nation in the disputes. Another reason China is the adversary is because they are the aggressor on many of the recent provocations. Finally, China appears to be attempting to control access or use of one of the most vital global commons of the world and preventing the United States from exercising freedom of navigation.

### U.S. Allies in the SCS dispute

#### Philippines

The United States and the Philippines (US-PH) have a unique history. In 1898, the Philippines became a territory of the United States, gained with victory over Spain. The defense treaty between the two nations was signed on August 30, 1951. The parties recognized that an armed attack in the Pacific area on either of the parties would be

dangerous to its own peace and safety and each party agreed that it would act to meet the common dangers in accordance with its constitutional processes.<sup>147</sup>

The Philippines has a military force of just over 125,000. Military spending in the Philippines is one of the lowest of the large countries in the Asia-Pacific, with a budget of just over \$2.5 billion dollars in 2015.<sup>148</sup> The Navy has only one surface combat ship, a frigate, but also operates five amphibious ships, sixty-eight coastal patrol vessels, thirty landing crafts, and eighteen logistical ships in a Navy of approximately 24,000 personnel.<sup>149</sup> The Philippines Army has over 84,000 personnel and has one armored division and ten light divisions.<sup>150</sup> The Philippines Air force operates eight combat aircraft, seven transports, and seventy-eight helicopters while the Philippines Navy operates six transport aircraft and three helicopters.<sup>151</sup>

Recently, the United States in the Philippines signed an Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. This agreement initially opens up the use of eight bases throughout the Philippines for U.S. Forces. The United States was also allowed to pre-position equipment in the Philippines as part of its Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement. This agreement highlights the Philippines diplomatic and military efforts to leverage its ally, the United States, to counter China's attempts to dominate the SCS.

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<sup>147</sup> U.S. Department of State, "U.S. Collective Defense Agreements," accessed April 1, 2015, <http://www.state.gov/s/l/treaty/collectivedefense>.

<sup>148</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 280.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid., 281.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid.

<sup>151</sup> Craig Hoyle, *World Air Forces* (Sutton, UK: Flight International, 2015), 26.



The Philippines has a dispute with China, and others, over the Spratly Island chain and over claimed EEZs. It occupies eight land features in the Spratly Island chain and claims Scarborough Shoal along with China.<sup>152</sup> China has been in military control of the Scarborough Shoal since 2012 after the Philippines withdrew from the Scarborough Shoal in a U.S. mediated deal.

### Other Forces in the SCS Dispute

#### Malaysia

Malaysia, although a claimant in the disputes, has valued stability over access to the disputed islands and territory in the SCS. Malaysia has established control over seven land features in the southern portion of the Spratly Island chain, but has not been overly aggressive in its actions towards China or other nations. Therefore, its actions associated with its territorial claims are less provocative and direct than Vietnam or the Philippines. Malaysia has been more active diplomatically than militarily over its SCS dispute with China, although they occupy four islands in the Spratly Island chain.<sup>153</sup> In 2009, Malaysia and Vietnam jointly submitted a letter to UNCLOS outlining its claim in the SCS. Malaysia is not an active security partner with Vietnam or the United States. In the 2015 NSS, the United States expressed a desire to expand partnership activities with Malaysia, but the relationship has not yet reached the status of a comprehensive partnership as Vietnam and Indonesia have.

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<sup>152</sup> Bellacqua, 14.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid., 16.

Malaysia has a defense budget of just over \$16 billion for a total active force of 110,000 and a reserve force of 52,000 personnel.<sup>154</sup> The Malaysia Navy operates two tactical submarines, ten frigates, and thirty-seven coastal patrol vessels. The Army has one armored regiment, five mechanized regiments and one mechanized brigade, and nine infantry brigades. The Malaysian Air Force has two fighter squadrons, five fighter/ground attack squadrons, one maritime patrol squadron, four transport squadrons, and four transport helicopter squadrons. Malaysia has undergone a military modernization program over the past thirty years, and is able to conduct small-scale operations outside its home area.<sup>155</sup> Outside of the SCS territorial disputes, Malaysia has security concerns over insurgent activity on its eastern portion of its Borneo Island territory.

Malaysia and China have had diplomatic relations since 1974 and in 2014 conducted the first military-to-military joint tabletop exercise between the two countries.<sup>156</sup> This suggests that Chinese-Malaysian relations have improved since tensions existed between the two countries over the ethnic tensions in Malaysia. China is Malaysia's largest trading partner and Malaysia's economic ties to China have seemingly taken priority over its territory disputes.

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<sup>154</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 268.

<sup>155</sup> Ibid.

<sup>156</sup> China's Global Times, "Joint Table Top Exercise between Armies of China, Malaysia Kicks off in Malaysia," December 22, 2014, accessed May 13, 2015, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/898040.shtml>.

## Brunei

Brunei has also not been active in the disputes in the SCS. Brunei is located on the northern shore of Borneo Island at the southern end of the SCS. Brunei claims only the Louisa Reef in the far southern part of the Spratly Islands but does not occupy that claim; Malaysia occupies the Louisa Reef. Brunei disputes China's claim of sovereignty over a portion of Brunei's claimed 200nm EEZ. Brunei has a 7,000 person active military. Brunei's Navy operates four corvettes and four landing craft, its Army has three light infantry battalions, and its Air Force consists of one maritime patrol squadron and three helicopter squadrons. The nation is small, does not have a significant capability to play a large role in the disputes, but is friendly towards the United States.

## Conclusion

The SCS is a diverse area and the territorial disputes risk the stability in the region. The United States seeks to enhance its relationships and influence in the region in order to attain its objectives. This research will now analyze the strengths and weaknesses of the United States, Vietnam, and China to discover opportunities and threats to the advancement of a US-VN security partnership.

## CHAPTER 4

### SWOT

The SWOT analysis for this research will examine the United States, Vietnam, and China and will focus primarily on the diplomatic and military aspects of national power. Military power is relative; therefore, the military capabilities are strengths in this analysis and analyzed in comparison to each other. This chapter will first compare strengths and weaknesses of each country and then discuss opportunities and threats.

#### United States

##### Diplomatic Strengths and Weaknesses

The U.S. diplomatic strength is its many allies and partners in the region. Of the alliances with South Korea, Japan, Thailand, the Philippines, and Australia, only the Philippines accord relates directly to the SCS. The network of U.S. alliances in Asia has been a source of stability in the region. A major multinational conflict in Asia would very likely involve the United States; therefore, few nations would risk escalation to conflict levels. This aversion to escalation of conflict provides the United States with an advantage in dealing with security concerns. Currently, the United States has embassies in both Beijing and Hanoi, which facilitates bilateral communications between both States.

Diplomatically, the United States is vying with China for influence in the Asia-Pacific region. The overall U.S. influence in the Asia-Pacific has weakened in recent years. For one, the United States was in such a dominant position that sustaining that level was extremely difficult. The absolute power of the United States has not

diminished; but relative to Chinese influence in the region, U.S. influence has diminished.

The United States is an observer in ASEAN as a dialogue partner. In 2010, U.S. diplomatic efforts with ASEAN failed to influence the regional organization to reach a consensus concerning the SCS territorial disputes. Diplomatically, as a dialogue partner in ASEAN the United States was able to influence the organization to discuss and attempt to develop an updated code of conduct in the SCS. This showed strength because the United States was able to set an agenda at a regional summit that is central to the efforts of the nations that oppose China in the territorial disputes.

Political disagreements in Washington have also weakened our diplomatic efforts by discrediting how it develops and gains a consensus on foreign policy. An example of this phenomenon is the letter sent to Iranian leaders over nuclear power negotiations. The intent of this letter was to prevent a nuclear agreement with Iran and to warn that any deal reached with the current administration will not be ratified by Congress. This letter blurred the unity of effort for U.S. foreign policy, put into question U.S. trustworthiness, and showed an example of how in-house disagreements affect how the United States deals with outside nations.

The political structure of the United States is also a weakness in areas pertaining to long-term issues requiring continuity in strategy. Each time an administration changes, the priorities, policies, and programs of the previous administration are at risk of also changing drastically to reflect the strategic direction of the new administration. The pivot to Asia is an example of a change in foreign policy priority from the Obama Administration after the previous administration focused on concerns in the Middle East.

The importance of the UN diminished for the United States because both the United States and China have veto power on the UN Security Council. China would likely veto any resolution that the United States brought forth to the UN concerning the disputes. This fact most likely precludes multinational solutions in the SCS.

### Military Strengths and Weaknesses

The U.S. Pacific Command controls the most capable force that operates in the SCS. U.S. Pacific Fleet, comprised of the Third and Seventh Fleets, has approximately 200 ships.<sup>157</sup> U.S. Third Fleet, headquartered out of San Diego, California is home to four out of ten U.S. aircraft carriers. The U.S. Seventh Fleet is a forward deployed fleet headquartered in Japan and is closest to the SCS. The U.S. Seventh Fleet in Japan has one assigned aircraft carrier.<sup>158</sup> There are other forward deployed naval activities in the Asia-Pacific, notably supply and support vessels in Guam, and currently one, out of a planned four, Littoral Combat Ships stationed in Singapore. U.S. Pacific Fleet has eighty-four surface combat ships besides the aircraft carriers. Those ships are eleven counter-mine vessels, six littoral combat ships, two frigates, thirty-five destroyers, twelve cruisers, six dock landing ships, one command ship, five amphibious transport ships, and six amphibious assault ships.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> See Appendix C for the U.S. order of battle.

<sup>158</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, “Asia,” 54.

<sup>159</sup> Commander, Submarine Force, U.S. Pacific Fleet, “COMSUBPAC Submarines,” U.S. Navy, accessed April 27, 2015, [http://www.csp.navy.mil/content/comsubpac\\_subsquadrons.shtml](http://www.csp.navy.mil/content/comsubpac_subsquadrons.shtml).

U.S. Pacific Fleet also has a robust subsurface capability. In total there are forty-three submarines assigned. They are located at four naval bases, with twenty submarines in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, thirteen in Bangor, Washington, six in San Diego, California, and four in Guam. U.S. Pacific Fleet is the most capable navy in the Asia-Pacific in terms of number of modern vessels, capabilities, and operational experience. It regularly participates in naval operations and bilateral engagements in the region, such as the April 2015 visit to Vietnam by the Littoral Combat Ship, the USS *Fort Worth*.<sup>160</sup>

The U.S. Army also has a large force in the Pacific that is able to conduct military-to-military exchanges and provide command and control of joint force operations. The U.S. Army-Pacific has I Corps, 2nd Infantry Division, and 25th Infantry Division assigned or aligned. These forces are a mix of light, motorized, and armored units that have capable equipment, advanced command and communications systems, and robust sustainment. These ground units have recent experience conducting large-scale and protracted operations. The headquarters of these units are proficient at commanding and controlling joint operations and can synchronize efforts in interagency and multinational environments. Elements of these units regularly conduct partnership activities through the Pacific Pathway exercises. An example is the Balikatan exercise conducted with the Philippines in 2014 where over 5,000 U.S. and Philippine military

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<sup>160</sup> Commander, Task Force 73 Public Affairs, U.S. Pacific Fleet. “U.S. Navy Kicks Off Naval Engagement Activities with Vietnam,” April 5, 2015, Commander, U.S. Pacific Fleet, accessed April 12, 2015, <http://www.cpf.navy.mil/news.aspx/030529>.

personnel conducted humanitarian civic assistance, staff planning, and maritime security operations on and around Luzon Island.<sup>161</sup>

The U.S. Air Force-Pacific operates out of bases in Japan, South Korea, Guam, Hawaii, and Alaska. The major units are the 5th Air Force in Yakota, Japan, the 7th Air Force in Osan, South Korea, the 11th Air Force in Joint Base Elmendorf-Richardson, Alaska, and 13th Air Force in Joint Base Pearl Harbor-Hickam, Hawaii. U.S. Air Force Pacific also has eight additional lift and fighter wings throughout the Pacific area of responsibility. U.S. Air Force Pacific is a strength for the United States because it operates more modern aircraft, such as fifth-generation fighters, than any nation in Asia-Pacific. The Air Force also has much larger strategic lift capability than any other nation in the SCS region. This lift capacity allows the U.S. military to be more expeditious and to project power from greater distances.

The U.S. Marine Corps is a capable ground and air force with two Marine Air/Ground Task Forces assigned to the Pacific. The forward deployed Marine Air/Ground Task Forces is the 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force, based out of Okinawa, Japan. The 3rd Marine Expeditionary Force is assigned the 3rd Marine Division ground element, the 1st Marine Aircraft Wing, and the 3rd Marine Logistics Group. This corps sized element is currently forward postured in Japan, 1,350 nautical miles from Cam Rahn Bay in Vietnam, and could deploy into the SCS within a few days after receiving

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<sup>161</sup> Sgt Isis, Ramirez, U.S. Marine Corps, “U.S., Philippine Forces Begin Bilateral Balikatan Exercise,” U.S. Department of Defense, May 6, 2014, accessed April 30, 2015, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=122191>.



orders. Soon, the 3rd Marine Division will reduce its footprint in Japan by 9,000, with the Marines moving to bases in Guam, Hawaii, and rotating into Australia.<sup>162</sup>

The 1st Marine Expeditionary Force is based out of Camp Pendleton, California and is composed of the 1st Marine Division ground element, the 3rd Marine Aircraft Wing, and the 1st Marine Logistics Group. The U.S. Marine Corps maintains a high state of readiness and is able to deploy from its home station rapidly. It provides the United States with a strong forward presence that could provide deterrence against conflict in the Asia-Pacific. The Marine Corps primarily performs amphibious operations, expeditionary support to crisis response and contingency operations, and special operations, which includes foreign internal defense.<sup>163</sup> The Marine Corps, together with the naval amphibious ships that support deployment, can provide capabilities, such as forced entry, at a scale and proficiency level that is unmatched in the SCS.

Limited basing options in the SCS, outside of the Philippines and Singapore, are a weakness for the U.S. military. The United States lost use of bases in the Philippines in 1992. Since then, for over a decade now, the US-PH military-to-military relationship has improved. In a contingency, the use of multiple bases in the Philippines is probable, although those bases are underdeveloped and require upgrades. The Changi Naval Base in Singapore is able to support aircraft carriers, but the narrowness of the Strait of

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<sup>162</sup> Bob Kovach and Chelsea J. Carter, “U.S.-Japan Deal Withdraws 9,000 Marines from Okinawa,” *CNN*, April 27, 2012, accessed April 27, 2015, <http://www.cnn.com/2012/04/27/world/asia/japan-us-okinawa>.

<sup>163</sup> Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Order 3120.93, Subject: Policy for Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) and Marine Expeditionary Units (Special Operations Capable (MEU SOC), Washington, DC, August 4, 2009, accessed August 30, 2015, <http://www.marines.mil/Portals/59/Publications/MCO%203120.9C.pdf>.

Malacca and the volume of vessels that traverse the strait would limit its effectiveness in large-scale operations. Another issue is that Changi Naval Base is not ideally located to support a conflict in the SCS. The shortest route to reach Changi Naval Base from the Seventh Fleet's location in Japan is through the SCS. This could prove difficult given China's anti-access area denial (A2/AD) efforts deny U.S. Forces access to the SCS. Another option to reach Singapore would be to go south of Indonesia, into the Indian Ocean, and enter from the west. This would add greatly to the time needed to position naval forces. Furthermore, the distance from Singapore to one of the main disputed portions of the Spratly Islands is over 1,000 kilometers. At that distance, loiter time of ground based fighter aircraft from Singapore would be significantly limited.

The distance from current Pacific bases of support, in Guam, Okinawa, and Hawaii to the SCS creates long lines of communication. The longer the lines of communication, the more logistical support is needed for operations and the need for security along the lines of communication. A basing issue would come to the forefront if a long-term military presence were required in the SCS, but most likely the Philippines, through its Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the United States, would provide the needed facilities.

Out of the total U.S. military force, U.S. Pacific Command currently has 320,000 military personnel assigned.<sup>164</sup> This represents a substantial commitment of the total forces of the United States. The U.S. military has many global commitments and its reliance on an all-volunteer force creates a challenge for the United States to expand the

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<sup>164</sup> U.S. Pacific Command, "About USPACOM," accessed April 15, 2015, <http://www.pacom.mil/AboutUSPACOM>.

forces quickly in the event of a contingency. The United States could divert forces from other Geographic Combatant Commands or call up reserve forces, but would have to accept risk in its other contingency operations. The total number of personnel in U.S. Pacific Command is also considerably smaller than the total number of Chinese forces and, depending on the contingency, this could be a weakness.



Figure 14. U.S. Forces Forward in the Asia-Pacific

Source: The Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, “18 Maps that Explain Maritime Security in Asia,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2015, accessed April 1, 2015, <http://amti.csis.org/atlas>.

## Vietnam

### Diplomatic Strengths and Weaknesses

Vietnam has expanded and strengthened its diplomatic efforts in recent years in order to build relationships with the United States, Russia, and India. Vietnam acquires arms from India, not wanting to rely solely on Russia. In 2007, India designated its relationship with Vietnam a strategic partnership; the highest level of diplomatic relationship that India has with any nation.<sup>165</sup> Annually, the two countries hold high-level diplomatic meetings that discuss defense production cooperation, sea-lane security, and port visits to Vietnam by the Indian Navy.

Vietnam's bilateral relationship with the United States is similar to its relationship with India. In 2013, the United States elevated the status of its relationship with Vietnam to a comprehensive partnership in order to advance the bilateral relationship and create a framework to work together on areas of common interest. The U.S. Navy regularly visits Vietnam's ports and the two nations have conducted humanitarian assistance focused military combined exercises. In 2014, the United States pledged to support Vietnam financially by funding Vietnam's maritime defense with \$18 million dollars. Maritime defense dollars could provide a more credible deterrent on its occupied islands in the Spratly Islands. Vietnam's relationship with the United States has also provided it with resources to strengthen its security in the SCS and could provide an effective deterrence from Chinese coercive measures in the SCS.

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<sup>165</sup> Carl Thayer, "How India-Vietnam Strategic Ties are Mutually Beneficial," *The Diplomat*, December 3, 2013, accessed December 13, 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/12/how-india-vietnam-strategic-ties-are-mutually-beneficial>.

Vietnam's diplomatic efforts have also included Russia and have brought the Russian Navy into the SCS. Already the main supplier of arms to Vietnam, Russia has built a maintenance facility in Cam Ranh Bay for Vietnam's newly acquired Kilo-class submarines.<sup>166</sup> Russia is also in talks with Vietnam to build a maintenance facility in Vietnam for its own use and regularly conducts port visits in Vietnam. Russia classifies Vietnam as a strategic partner and Russian Prime Minister Medvedev conducted a state visit to Vietnam in April 2015 with the purpose of solidifying Vietnamese-Russian bilateral defense cooperation.<sup>167</sup>

Vietnam's diplomatic activities have resulted in a changed security landscape in the SCS. The advanced navies of the United States, Russia, and India now regularly operate in the SCS enroute to security cooperation events with Vietnam. For Vietnam, this has perpetuated the presence of strong outside naval powers in the SCS and has further solidified the partnerships between Vietnam and strong regional powers that act as a regional balance of power.

Vietnam is becoming a regional diplomatic leader in both ASEAN and through its effort with the UN. In 2009, Vietnam and Malaysia jointly submitted a letter to the UN claiming its continental shelf under the provisions of the UNCLOS. This submission was an effort to internationalize the issue and force China to negotiate multilaterally. In 2010, Vietnam used its position as the head of ASEAN in an attempt to consolidate ASEAN's

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<sup>166</sup> Raine and Le Miere, 119.

<sup>167</sup> Stephen Bank, "Russia's Game in Southeast Asia," *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 12, no. 80 (April 29, 2015), The Jamestown Foundation, accessed April 30, 2015, [http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx\\_ttnews%5Btt\\_news%5D=43850&cHash=18a2fd126b7aa4db2a5d8c9780441cc0](http://www.jamestown.org/programs/edm/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43850&cHash=18a2fd126b7aa4db2a5d8c9780441cc0).

position on the SCS territorial disputes. It was through Vietnam's insistence that security issues and territorial disputes became part of the agenda for the 2010 ASEAN summit.<sup>168</sup> Vietnam has also shown the most diplomatic skill thus far in dealing with China. It was able to negotiate a delineation of the northern portion of the Gulf of Tonkin, which stands as the only resolved maritime dispute involving China in the SCS.

Vietnam's leadership has become necessary for continuing the efforts of those opposed to China in the SCS territorial disputes. Brunei has become largely silent in pursuing negotiations with its claims. Malaysia has been less active in the SCS dispute due to improved relations with China. Indonesia does not have a disputed claim, and has not publically expressed a policy concerning the SCS territorial disputes. The Philippines, although still actively pursuing legal resolution, is marred with internal strife and has little power or capabilities to make a difference.<sup>169</sup> Given the unwillingness or inability of the other claimants, Vietnam has ascended to the diplomatic lead in the SCS dispute.

Vietnam's diplomatic weakness is its mistrust of foreign powers that hinders its ability to develop bilateral relations to its full potential. This mistrust originated through its historical experience with the Soviet Union and China. During the Vietnam War, China was a supporter of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam (North Vietnam) in its war with South Vietnam and the United States. The relationship between the two communist governments turned when China forcefully took possession of the Paracel Islands from South Vietnam in 1974.

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<sup>168</sup> Dolven, Kan, and Manyin, 12.

<sup>169</sup> Kaplan, *Asia's Cauldron*, 53.

In 1979, Vietnam felt betrayed again by a foreign power. Vietnam signed a Mutual Defense Treaty with the Soviet Union in 1978, but when fighting broke out between Vietnam and China in 1979, the Soviet Union failed to abide by its commitment to support Vietnam. These experiences form a foundation for how Vietnam now deals with other nations today, and because of this distrust, Vietnam is reluctant to fully partner with the United States. Vietnam's experience also provides the incentive to seek multiple security partners. Thus far, this strategy has not had an adverse effect on Vietnam's diplomatic efforts, but diplomatic miscalculation could lead to harm in its relationships with its strong Asian regional partners. This could be especially true in dealing militarily with Russia and the United States. Russia has used Vietnam's air bases for refueling operations and then subsequently conducted reconnaissance on U.S. military forces.<sup>170</sup> If this practice continues, then the US-VN relationship could suffer.

### Military Strengths and Weakness

Vietnam's military, although smaller and less modern, is a significant deterrent to Chinese aggression. Vietnam's military culture has produced brave and committed fighters, which is part of its military strength. Vietnam defeated a Chinese land invasion in 1979 and exposed weaknesses in the PLA. The Vietnamese military has a total active strength of 480,000.<sup>171</sup> Vietnam also has one of the largest reserve forces in the world, totaling over five million people. The reserve force is composed of former military conscripts and civilians, as well as organizations that can augment its wartime economy.

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<sup>170</sup> Bank.

<sup>171</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 294.

The government of Vietnam requires each local district to select and train a prescribed number of reserve soldiers every year.<sup>172</sup>

Vietnam's military is organized into eight military regions for its Navy, Army, and Air Forces. In 2015, the Vietnamese Navy operated four tactical submarines, two frigates, and sixty-eight coastal patrol vessels. The Vietnamese Army has six armor brigades and three armor regiments, two mechanized infantry divisions, twenty-three active and nine reserve light infantry divisions. The Air Force operates four fighter regiments, four ground attack regiments, two transport regiments, and two attack and transportation helicopter regiments. Vietnam also has a large force of naval infantry, with 30,000 personnel in 2015.<sup>173</sup> This force was developed out of a need to protect its occupied Spratly Islands, because only recently has Vietnam had the capability to provide air support.<sup>174</sup> Vietnam's Navy operates landing ships and craft that can only accommodate 1,500 troops. This strength can be beneficial in two ways: by solidifying Vietnam's occupation in the Spratly Islands or used as a landing force to conduct a forced entry.

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<sup>172</sup> Socialist Republic of Vietnam-Ministry of Defense, *Socialist Republic of Vietnam-Ministry of Defense: Reserve*, Socialist Republic of Vietnam, 2013, accessed April 30, 2015, [http://www.mod.gov.vn/wps/portal/!ut/p/b1/vZTJjqMwElafpR8gwuzkaAIJDmD29YJIWMIWEkICydNPujWj0Sjq7suo7ZPlr\\_xX1a8yERMhER\\_TW1WmY9Uf0\\_b9HHPJGmJbEEkINjTJAyRCy2QMhgKQegLREwCfLAj-jTd4tAZoK6u0bgASQPp3\\_F\\_AUN4BiLNZxFGIZL\\_TD4jQjQAv9foky7Zp8d19ipMojhiRDoewVHEpSyVbTBM4B](http://www.mod.gov.vn/wps/portal/!ut/p/b1/vZTJjqMwElafpR8gwuzkaAIJDmD29YJIWMIWEkICydNPujWj0Sjq7suo7ZPlr_xX1a8yERMhER_TW1WmY9Uf0_b9HHPJGmJbEEkINjTJAyRCy2QMhgKQegLREwCfLAj-jTd4tAZoK6u0bgASQPp3_F_AUN4BiLNZxFGIZL_TD4jQjQAv9foky7Zp8d19ipMojhiRDoewVHEpSyVbTBM4B).

<sup>173</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 294.

<sup>174</sup> Clive Schofield, "An Arms Race in the South China Sea," *IBRU Boundary and Security Bulletin* (July 1994): 43, accessed May 15, 2015, [https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/publications/full/bsb2-2\\_schofield.pdf](https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/ibru/publications/full/bsb2-2_schofield.pdf).



The large reserve force in Vietnam gives it the ability to rapidly expand the number of military personnel in the event of a large-scale conflict without the need to train the personnel on basic military tasks. Vietnam's military is far from matching the PLA in terms of number of personnel or modern equipment, but they have offset some of its shortcoming through the fighting spirit of its military and the wide support of the military from the government and the people. Vietnam is the most experienced military and the best military deterrent to Chinese aggression out of all the militaries in Southeast Asia.<sup>175</sup>

Vietnam holds a positional advantage in the Spratly Islands because it occupies the preponderance of land features, totaling twenty-nine islands.<sup>176</sup> This is an advantage because occupation gives them a starting point for negotiation and prevents a further Chinese occupation in the Spratly Islands. At this point in the dispute, occupation of the Spratly Islands is the only thing preventing China's complete control of the entire SCS; China already occupies all of the Parcel Islands, the Scarborough Shoal, and seven islands in the Spratly Island chain.

Because Vietnam's population and economic output compared to China is relatively small, the Vietnamese military is inferior to the Chinese in number of personnel and equipment modernization. The Vietnamese military was neglected and operated with little funding until economic expansion enabled procurement of advanced weapon systems in the last decade. Some of the advanced weapon systems, such as Kilo-class

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<sup>175</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 293.

<sup>176</sup> Bellacqua, 16.

submarines and SU-30MK2 aircraft, require a robust maintenance and training program. Building maintenance and training proficiency is a substantial commitment.

A second weakness for Vietnam's military is the small number of ships that are ideal for operations on the high seas. Currently, Vietnam only deploys two frigates and four submarines, which is not sufficient to secure its occupied land features of the Spratly Islands.<sup>177</sup> To overcome these military weaknesses, Vietnam will require large amounts of naval military expenditures beyond what it has already purchased from Russia and the Netherlands.

## China

### Diplomatic Strengths and Weaknesses

China is a permanent member with veto power on the UN Security Council. This allows China to block Security Council resolutions concerning the SCS territorial disputes, and permits China to further its strategy of not dealing with the issues in multinational forums. Since China is the aggressor in the SCS, veto power is a strength since most resolutions would aim at changing Chinese policy. China can continue with its current land reclamation program without the possibility of a Security Council resolution forcing a policy change.

China participates in many of the multinational organizations in the Asia-Pacific, and many of those organizations discuss the disputes in the SCS. China is a part of ASEAN +3, which is a forum between Southeast Asian nations and the three main East Asian nations; China, Japan, and South Korea. This forum does not include the United

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<sup>177</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 294.

States and therefore includes discussion of the SCS disputes without U.S. influence. Both the United States and China are dialogue members of ASEAN. The other multinational organizations that China belongs to that discusses SCS issues are the East Asian Summit and the ASEAN regional forum. China's role in these multinational organizations allows it a forum to try to alleviate other claimants' concerns over its intentions in the SCS and a pathway to greater regional leadership.<sup>178</sup>

China is the rising power in the Asia-Pacific. This reality has made many nations willing to participate in Chinese led initiatives, such as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Nations that work with China on these initiatives seek to benefit from its rising economic power and influence in international affairs. According to power transition theory, rising powers tend to develop new relationships and organizations to cooperate with outside nations.<sup>179</sup> China's rise has provided it with the opportunity to develop institutions that could be more beneficial to China than the established forums that currently discuss the territorial disputes with ASEAN nations.

A mistrust of China's intentions in the territorial disputes has resulted in a weakness in China's diplomatic efforts. China is surrounded by nations that have fought against it throughout history. China also has a history of dominating its neighbors through its tributary system. Recent assertive actions within the SCS have cast doubt on China's trustworthiness and its claim to a peaceful rise. This assertive new China became

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<sup>178</sup> Haibin Niu and Nicole White, "New Wave of China's Multilateral Diplomacy," Center for Strategic and International Studies, June 29, 2014, accessed May 1, 2015, <http://cogitasia.com/new-wave-of-chinas-multilateral-diplomacy/>.

<sup>179</sup> Zhu, 168.

apparent after Xi Jinping was elevated to the position of the General Secretary of the Communist Party of China and Chairman of the Central Military Commission. Some would argue that General Secretary Xi is pursuing policies that are more aggressive because he believes it is a time of strategic opportunity for China.

One consequence of China's aggressive actions is that it is unifying other countries together, notably the Southeast Asian countries, into regional organizations that can collectively deal with China. This is counter to China's desire to negotiate any dispute bilaterally. Another secondary consequence is that it is pushing nations to seek relations with outside powers and bringing them into Asian regional organizations, which is especially apparent in Vietnam's diplomatic efforts. These outside powers, brought into the SCS disputes, have been diplomatically opposed to China's Asian supremacy, such as India and the United States.

China's diplomatic ties to unstable and rogue governments, notably in the countries of Iran, North Korea, and Venezuela, have harmed its credibility with the international community and especially the West. China's human rights record and its tolerance of nations that have poor human rights records further harm its reputation. This lack of credibility prevents some nations from entering into diplomatic agreements with China based on internal laws banning relations with human rights violators.

The refusal to participate in international courts to settle the SCS disputes highlights China's strong arm bilateral tactics and again bring into question China's trustworthiness as a nation. Many believe its claims are not valid and that if China agreed to international arbitration then the resolution would not favor China. China has been

rigid in dealing with neighbors, apparently attempting to bully the smaller nations in the SCS.

### Military Strengths and Weaknesses

The PLA in China is massive. The overall strength of the active force is over 2.3 million people and the reserve and paramilitary force is almost 1.2 million.<sup>180</sup> The PLA is far less committed globally than the U.S. military. The PLAN rarely patrols outside its first island chain, and tends to stay within their waters unless deployed. Although recently, the PLAN has deployed more frequently to the Western Indian Ocean to conduct counter piracy operations. However, all three of China's Fleets (North Sea Fleet at Qingdao, East Sea Fleet at Ningbo, South Sea Fleet at Zhanjiang) could be at the SCS within a few days (see figure 15). China also has developed road and rails system that could move ground forces in and around the Guangzhou and Nanjing military regions rather quickly.

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<sup>180</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 237.



Figure 15. PLAN and PLAAF Locations

Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), 80, accessed March 15, 2015, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014\\_DoD\\_China\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf).

China's modernization trends and key capabilities under development are designed to counter U.S. strengths. China is building an A2/AD system that will deny the United States the ability to counter China's efforts in its near sea areas. China's anti-ship cruise missiles and advances in over-the-horizon targeting are problematic for the United

States.<sup>181</sup> This military capability, designed specifically to counter U.S. naval strengths and particularly U.S. aircraft carriers, could be a powerful sea-denial weapon in the SCS. Protection of U.S. aircraft carriers is of paramount importance for the U.S. Navy, and the fact that China possesses such a capability would complicate U.S. operations in the SCS in the event of hostilities.

The focus on anti-ship weapons is part of a larger modernization priority for China's A2/AD systems.<sup>182</sup> China's traditional missile programs, such as their medium range ballistic missiles, can now reach bases in Okinawa and Guam, and provide a challenge for U.S. military planners to counter. China is also developing fifth-generation fighters, which are more capable of conducting operations in an informationalized wartime environment. These fighters will further solidify China's air superiority in the SCS region over its rivals in the claims and provide a challenge for U.S. forces, which are accustomed to air superiority.

Geographically, China has an advantage over the United States in the SCS. The southern portion of China borders the SCS, which provides China with multiple basing options in close proximity to the disputed areas. In addition, China's large numbers of Chinese Maritime Surveillance and PLAN coastal patrol vessels are regularly deployed to the SCS, because it is relatively easy to support them. China also employs a large number of irregular naval forces, including merchant marine fishing vessels from the southern coast of China that act as advance reconnaissance platforms for the PLAN. This

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<sup>181</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 207.

<sup>182</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 30.

proximity allows China early warning of activity by rival claimants and an enhanced surveillance capability, which results in China being more responsive with its conventional maritime forces.

Militarily, China is superior to each of its Southeast Asian neighbors bilaterally; but not multilaterally and not when U.S. capabilities are added. Two out of the seven Military Regions, the Guangzhou and Nanjing, are postured in areas that border the SCS (see figure 16). The PLAN's South Sea Fleet is located within the Guangzhou Military Region. In total, the South Sea Fleet controls fifty-six principal combat ships, which include three nuclear power ballistic missile submarines, two attack submarines, eighteen hunter-killer submarines, six destroyers, and twenty-seven frigates.<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>183</sup> International Institute for Strategic Studies, "Asia," 245.





Figure 16. China's Military Regions

Source: "China's Military Regions," presented by LTC Gene Richards in A553-China: Military Art, War and Revolutions, and the People's Liberation Army, U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, Fort Leavenworth, KS. Original source is a 1996 Central Intelligence Agency image.

The ground forces in the Guangzhou and Nanjing Military Regions consist of six Army Groups (see figure 17). A Chinese Army Group is roughly equivalent to an American Army Corps and has approximately 45,000 to 60,000 members.<sup>184</sup> The Guangzhou Military Region consists of two amphibious Army groups and one airborne

<sup>184</sup> Dennis J. Blasko, *PLA Ground Forces: Moving Towards a Smaller, More Rapidly Deployable, Modern Combined Arms Force* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Center for Asia-Pacific Policy, 2000), 317.

corps and the Nanjing military region has three amphibious Army groups. All six army groups are designed and organized for offensive operations. The Guangzhou ground forces are built to conduct forced entry landing and seizure of airfields, which is ideal for the possible ground conditions in the SCS. The Nanjing Military Region is organized to support contingency operations in Taiwan. China's ground forces, in conjunction with other forces, are capable of conducting small-scale amphibious landings. Without moving forces that are postured directly against Taiwan, China could use the 1st and 12th Army Group from the Nanjing Military Region and the 41st Army Group from the Guangzhou Military Region in operations in the SCS. However, projection of those forces would be difficult because China lacks a sufficient number of airlift and sea transport assets.



Figure 17. PLA Army Group Locations

Source: Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2014), 79, accessed March 15, 2015, [http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014\\_DoD\\_China\\_Report.pdf](http://www.defense.gov/pubs/2014_DoD_China_Report.pdf).

In the Guangzhou Military Regions, the People's Liberation Army Air Force (PLAAF) has four fighter and one bomber division and two fighter divisions from the PLAN South Sea Fleet. The Nanjing Military Region consists of three fighter, one ground attack, and one bomber division from the PLAAF and the PLAN East Sea Fleet has a fighter and a fighter-bomber division. A PLAAF division contains approximately 8-120 combat aircraft. Only a third of the Chinese combat aircraft are modern, compared to the U.S. Air Force. The military in China is the largest and most capable traditional force in the SCS region; however, it is not superior to U.S. Pacific Command's assets, nor could it project power in the SCS at a large scale. In aggregate, the militaries of the countries in dispute with China in the SCS would be a formidable adversary for China.

China's military has widespread modernization needs and its uneven development across the armed forces is a weaknesses. In the PLAN, this is evident in its limited anti-submarine warfare capabilities.<sup>185</sup> Another weakness is China's inability to collect targeting data with any accuracy from distances outside of its first island chain.<sup>186</sup> These weaknesses cast doubt on China's ability to conduct A2/AD operations against the United States. To close the capability gaps, China continues its modernization program. The cost of modernization across its entire force will be immense, and require a substantial amount of time. China, due to domestic consideration, has prioritized economic growth. Therefore, growth in military spending will be limited by the need to continue its

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<sup>185</sup> Office of the Secretary of Defense, *Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China*, 32.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid.

economic growth.<sup>187</sup> Another weakness of the PLA is that it is plagued with rampant corruption and bureaucracy. Changing the culture of the PLA will take time and corruption will continue to be a problem. Corruption has been such a problem that General Secretary Xi has recently relieved several high-level general officers.

China faces numerous security issues and cannot focus solely on maritime territorial disputes. Examples of security concerns are Taiwan, the insurgency in Xinjiang province supported by the Muslim world, and the desire for independence in Tibet that is supported by India and the United States. China is also concerned about stability on the Korean Peninsula, and provides support to North Korea so that it can continue to act as a buffer state from Western influence in South Korea. In the East China Sea, China has ongoing territorial disputes with Japan, China's historic enemy. China faces one of the more complex security environments in the world and must apportion its military assets appropriately.

### Summary

All three nations in this research, the United States, Vietnam, and China, have a unique set of diplomatic and military strengths and weaknesses. The strengths are circumstances or resources that could help attain a country's objectives, while weaknesses are circumstances or lack of resources that, if not mitigated, may put at risk the ability of each country to meet its objectives in the SCS. This portion of the SWOT analysis identified those nation's strengths and weaknesses and displays them in table 4.

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<sup>187</sup> Wu Xinbo, *Integration on the Basis of Strength: China's Impact on East Asian Security* (Stanford, CA: Asia/Pacific Research Center, Sanford University, 1998), accessed 27 November 2014, <http://www.ciaonet.org/wps/xiw01>.

The table is a visual representation that allows easy comparison of strengths and weaknesses, therefore enabling identification of opportunities and threats.

Table 4. Strengths and Weaknesses in the SCS Dispute

		Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses	Strengths	Weaknesses
<b>Diplomatic</b>	<b>Allies/ Security Partners</b>	Philippines / Vietnam		United States/ Russia/ India	Limits to partnerships based on mistrust		Contentious relationship with neighbors
	<b>Organizations</b>	Influence in ASEAN addenda, Veto In United Nations security council				Veto In United Nations security council, Participation in Asian multilateral organizations	Uncooperative with the established international conflict resolution systems
	<b>Regional Influence</b>		Relative diminishing influence	Leadership in ASEAN		Rising power	
	<b>Other</b>		Political Continuity				Ties to rouge regimes
<b>Military</b>	<b>Maritime</b>	U.S Navy: 5 aircraft carriers(associated naval air), 84 surface combat ships, 43 subsurface combat ships	Limited basing in SCS, Distance to Supply	Navy: 2 surface combat ships, 4 subsurface combat ships, 68 coastal patrol	Large force modernization requirements, limited blue water capability	South Sea Fleet: 33 surface combat ships, 23 subsurface combat ships, Quickly move North & East Sea Fleets into SCS	Uneven Modernization, limited force projection,
	<b>Ground</b>	U.S. Army: 1 Corps, 2 Division ~ 50,000 Soldiers	Limited basing in SCS, Distance to base of supply	Army: 32 light divisions, 2 mechanized divisions, 6 armor brigades, 2 armor regiments ~ 412,000		PLA Guangzhou & Nanjing Military Regions: 6 Army Groups ( 5 amphibious, 1 Airborne) ~ 360,000 troops	
	<b>Air</b>	U.S Air Force: 5th, 7th, 11th AF, 8 Wings. Large lift and transport capability	Limited basing in SCS, Distance to Supply	Air Forces: 4 fighter regiments, 4 ground attack regiments, 2 transport regiments, 2 attack/transport helicopter regiments	Modernization, Maintenance, and Training	PLAAF Guangzhou & Nanjing Military Regions (including South & East Sea Fleet Air): 10 fighter divisions, 3 bomber divisions, 1 ground attack division. ~ 1680 combat aircraft	Uneven modernization, Limited force projection,
	<b>Amphibious</b>	USMC: 2x MEF with air wings	Limited basing in SCS, Distance to Supply		Naval Infantry: 30,000 with limited transport capacity		No organization outside the amphibious trained PLA ground forces
	<b>Other</b>		Inability to rapidly expand forces, PACOM forces committed outside Pacific	Location in proximity to territory disputes, long SCS coastline, Largest SE Asian military, Military Tradition	Modernization, maintenance. and training program for advanced equipment	Military size, proximity to SCS, Growing A2/AD technology	Complex security environment, Corruption

Source: Created by author.

### U.S. Opportunities and Threats

Diplomatically, the United States has an opportunity to strengthen its partnerships in the SCS region because of Vietnam's desire to partner with strong nations that can act as a counter to China's power in the SCS. The United States, through open support and advancement of its Vietnamese comprehensive partnership, could gain greater trust from ASEAN nations. This could help alleviate any suspicions the people of the region have towards U.S. intentions as an outside power and counter China's Asia for Asian narrative.<sup>188</sup> The United States deals with security matters bilaterally and multilaterally. Cooperating with Vietnam on SCS security issues may gain popular support from people in Asia.

Militarily, the United States lacks basing options in the SCS. Vietnam provides an option and an ideal strategic location. It has a long coastline on the western edge of the SCS, as well as a land border with China. Vietnam's location is closer to the sea-lane than the Philippines and allows air forces to support operations over the entire SCS, just as bases in the Philippines would. Basing could also allow the United States to pre-positioned war stocks, equipment sets, and nonlethal supplies, such as equipment needed for contingency plans or supplies for humanitarian assistance missions. These basing options in Vietnam are threatened and offset by China's A2/AD capabilities.

The United States has an opportunity to augment its ground forces in the Asia-Pacific by leveraging Vietnam's capabilities. U.S. ground forces in the Asia-Pacific are relatively few, especially when compared to Vietnam and China. Vietnam, with its

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<sup>188</sup> Gilbert Rozman, "Asia for the Asians: Why Chinese-Russian Friendship is Here to Stay," *Foreign Affairs*, October 29, 2014, accessed May 19, 2015, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/east-asia/2014-10-29/asia-asians>.

412,000 active forces and over 5 million reserves, could augment U.S. ground forces, if needed, until the United States had time to build its land forces for the Asia-Pacific in the event of crisis.

The United States faces diplomatic threats from China. China's rise is diminishing U.S. relative influence in the SCS region. Its efforts to create regional organizations that exclude the United States could result in security policy direction developed without U.S. input. China seeks a regional order where it is the dominant power. Even Vietnam must keep its relations with China a priority, possibly even over its relationship with the United States.

Militarily, the United States faces the threat of China denying U.S. military access to the SCS by using its A2/AD capabilities. The United States military has enjoyed a technological advantage over other militaries in the Asia-Pacific, but that advantage is quickly eroding and U.S. military technical superiority is at risk. China, with increased defense budgets, has pursued technologies that counter U.S. military advantages. China's increasing military budget and its modernization program has allowed for the technological gap between the two nations to close considerably. U.S. forces must project power into the SCS from bases at great distances. If China were to develop the ability to deny access to the SCS, then U.S. strengths could be negated.

#### Vietnam's Opportunities and Threats

The United States provides Vietnam with an opportunity to highlight its struggle with China to the international community. The United States is a leading voice for many of the international organizations, and the United States advocating on behalf of Vietnam



could be powerful, especially in the UN, even if Security Council resolutions are vetoed by China.

Based on Vietnam's military weaknesses, the United States could provide substantial assistance in establishing training institutions in Vietnam in order to maximize the capability of its new weapon systems. Vietnam could benefit from expanded military-to-military exchanges with the United States that could enhance Vietnam's ability to conduct security along its sea lines of communication (SLOC) through the SCS. Vietnam could also leverage the U.S. Marine Corps for training assistance in conducting island defense and amphibious force entry operations. This would better utilize Vietnam's large number of naval infantry.

The United States also provides Vietnam with an opportunity to enhance its capabilities through military sales. Recently, U.S. military sales have opened for Vietnam. In 2006, the ban was lifted to allow nonlethal items and expanded in 2014 to include lethal air platforms for the purpose of surveillance.<sup>189</sup> Given the alignment of interest, there are more opportunities and incentives for the United States to expand military sales to Vietnam including lethal items.

China threatens Vietnam's strategy of counterbalance by its own diplomatic ties with Vietnam's security partners; this is especially true of the Russia and even the United States. The US-CN relationship is the most important security and economic relationship in the world. It is unlikely that the United States would support Vietnam if it meant irrevocable harm to its relationship with China, and the same is true for Russia. Interests

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<sup>189</sup> Matthew Pennington, "U.S. Eases Ban on Weapons Sales to Vietnam," *Huffington Post*, October 2, 2014, accessed May 13, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/02/us-weapons-sales-to-vietnam\\_n\\_5924728.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/02/us-weapons-sales-to-vietnam_n_5924728.html).

are once again aligning between Russia and China. Russia is looking for a buyer of its energy resources because Western sanctions and the drop in oil prices have severely harmed its economy. China is looking for diversified energy sources that do not rely on SCS transit. Russia is currently supplying Vietnam with arms and is collaborating with Vietnam on the Cam Rahn Bay naval facility; however, just as in 1979, Russia will likely not harm its relationship with China for the sake of Vietnamese security.

Vietnam's human rights record threatens its relationship with the United States. The United States passed the Leahy Amendment in 1997, which prohibits security assistance with a military unit that the State Department categorizes as committing gross human rights violations. For security assistance to occur, each unit is screened for human rights violations in a process called Leahy vetting. Leahy vetting could prove to be a threat to the advancement of a US-VN security partnership.

The greatest threat to Vietnam is conflict with China. Alone, Vietnam would lose in an all-out conflict with China. It is also unlikely that many nations would actively support Vietnam militarily in a conflict with China, especially if Vietnam was perceived as the aggressor. Vietnam must work towards securing the current state in the dispute in the SCS and make changing the status quo too costly for China.

### Chinese Opportunities and Threats

China's status as a permanent member of the UN Security Council provides an opportunity to negotiate the dispute from a position of strength. No international or multinational organization is willing or powerful enough to force China to negotiate a settlement in the dispute. The diplomatic environment is ideal for China's Salami Slicing

strategy of gradually changing the conditions on the ground. China has the opportunity to establish *de facto* control over the SCS if conditions do not change.

As the rising power, China has an opportunity to reshape the multinational organizational landscape in Asia. The current international framework in Asia reflects the balance of power in the world immediately following World War II. Nations have shown a willingness to operate under a new Asian order led by China. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization are examples of China's efforts to reshape the regional order.

China has an opportunity to isolate the SCS by further developing and deploying technologies that will deny or threaten access. Currently, China has a moment of strategic opportunity to further close the capabilities and technology gap between itself and the United States, which is partly attributed to the decline in U.S. defense spending. China could also use this moment of strategic opportunity to advance its A2/AD capabilities, which could further offset U.S. military strengths.

However, China's assertive stance in the SCS is harming its diplomatic power. Since 2010, China has faced mounting pressure from the international community to operate within the accepted international norms and to negotiate the disputes with its neighbors. The international community is applying pressure because of China's provocative actions in the SCS and elsewhere. Thus far, China has refused to work with the international community and risk weakening itself diplomatically. China's coercive action could result in its neighbors aligning against China. China's actions are not mitigating its security threats, but rather, are creating a more tense security situation.

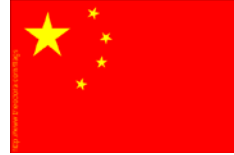
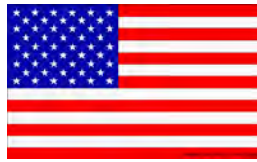
Corruption in China is threatening to derail its force modernization goals. China's force modernization program has been uneven and slow, which is partly due to the rampant corruption within the PLA. Without widespread corruption in the PLA, China would likely be farther along on its goals to develop a modern military force. The PLA is also untested on war since 1979.

The airpower of the United States is the most substantial threat to China's military in the SCS. The air domain is the area where China is still substantially inferior to the United States, although all of China's military domains are inferior to U.S. military capabilities. In terms of total air fleet, the United States has over four times the aircraft that China has, and U.S. aircraft are more modern and capable.<sup>190</sup> China may have the capability to deny the SCS from U.S. surface vessels, but given the U.S. probable use of the Philippine air bases in the event of conflict, U.S. airpower will still be able to challenge any Chinese aggression in the SCS. China's A2/AD capabilities may be able to deny the use of the Philippines bases, but, given the distance, would be a challenge.

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<sup>190</sup> Hoyle, 15.

Table 5. Opportunities and Threats



		United States	Vietnam	China
Opportunities	Diplomatic	Strengthen security partnerships in SCS	International awareness of SCS dispute	Negotiate bilaterally, Ability to reshape regional order
	Military	Basing in Vietnam, Augmentation to PACOM's Ground Forces	Training and Doctrine development assistance, Purchase of advanced military equipment	Narrow technology gap
Threats	Diplomatic	Diminishing Influence in the Asia-Pacific	China's relationship with Vietnam's strategic partners	Aggression that results in weakness in diplomatic power
	Military	Access to the SCS	Conflict with China	Corruption's impact on Force Modernization, US air power superiority

Source: Created by author.

## CHAPTER 5

### OPTIONS FOR A US-VN SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

#### Purpose

Chapter 5 presents available options for a US-VN security partnership and the options associated risks. Chapter 3 provided the foundation and the visualization of the problem in order to conduct further analysis. The SWOT analysis in the previous chapter formed the basis to assess the options by helping to identify the opportunities and threats to the United States and Vietnam in the SCS. The options are either increased or decreased security partnership activities with Vietnam relative to the current security partnership activities. These options are compared, against criteria, to determine a recommended option for a US-VN security partnership. This research ends with a recommended option for a US-VN security partnership that helps attain U.S. objectives in the SCS. Analyzing these options will answer whether or not an advancement of a security partnership between the United States and Vietnam helps to attain U.S. objectives in the SCS.

#### Criteria to Evaluate Options

In the SCS, the primary U.S. objectives are freedom of navigation, open access to sea-lanes, and rule of law. In 2010, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton stated, “The United States has a national interest in freedom of navigation, open access to Asia’s maritime commons and respect for international law in the South China Sea.”<sup>191</sup> Therefore, options

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<sup>191</sup> Mark Landler, “Offering to Aid Talks, U.S. Challenges China on Disputed Islands,” *New York Times*, July 23, 2010, accessed May 4, 2015, [http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/24/world/asia/24diplo.html?\\_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/24/world/asia/24diplo.html?_r=0).

for a US-VN security partnership are first evaluated by its ability to retain freedom of navigation and an open SLOC in the SCS. Other evaluation criteria for options are the risks of those options and the opportunities or threats of those options. Therefore, the four criteria to evaluate a US-VN security partnership are: (1) Does it help assure freedom of navigation and an open SLOCs; (2) What are the impacts to US-CN relations; (3) What are the impacts on U.S. allies and other partnerships in the region; (4) What opportunities does this option provide for the United States; and (5) What threats does this option present for the United States?

This research is qualitative and the options are evaluated based on the criteria, therefore, quantitative weighting of each criterion will not be used. However, in the evaluation, the ability of an option to contribute to assured freedom of navigation and to maintain an open SLOC in the SCS will be preferred over other criteria. The research's recommendation will select the option that best meets criteria one with an acceptable balance on the effects that the option has on US-CN relations and U.S. relations with allies and partners in the region. Considering the opportunities and threats of each option will further differentiate the options and assist in selecting the optimal option.

Options for the United States vis-à-vis Vietnam to  
Secure its Objectives and the Potential Risks

Option One (Decrease US-VN Security Partnership)

In this option, the United States decreases its security partnership with Vietnam. Based on the SWOT analysis, Vietnam's diplomatic threat could be realized if the United States chooses in this option. The United States may choose to prioritize its relationship with China over a security partnership in Vietnam. The United States may also choose

this option because Vietnam has increased its security partnership with Russia, and therefore, does not wish to continue to strengthen its relationship with the United States. The United States may politically end the security partnership with Vietnam by passing a Vietnam Human Rights Acts that prevents any further security relationship. The United States could decrease its partnership activities by forgoing future naval port visits, ending its military sales program, halting future cooperation by removing Vietnam from its list of comprehensive partners in the region, and discontinue any combined training events. The international military education program could continue, although it would be limited.

This option does not promote U.S. freedom of navigation and open SLOCs in the SCS. The United States would need to pursue other means to ensure freedom of navigation and open SLOCs, but would not strengthen Vietnam's military capabilities with the purpose of preventing the Chinese from dominating the SCS. China would most likely continue to challenge U.S. military operations in the SCS as it has previously, most recently in 2014 when China attempted to disrupt the operations of a U.S. surveillance aircraft east of Hainan Island.<sup>192</sup> This option is likely to improve relations with China. Although this option improves relations with China, it will embolden China to be more assertive in the SCS territorial disputes, leading to an adverse impact on the US-PH alliance. Furthermore, the United States could appear to have abandoned its security efforts in the SCS. An emboldened China and a United States that is less active in providing security in the SCS will probably increase the likelihood of China acting more assertively towards the Philippines in the SCS territorial disputes.

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<sup>192</sup> See Appendix B, Incidents in the SCS.



Diminished U.S. influence in the SCS is a threat discovered from the SWOT analysis, and this option is highly likely to contribute to the decline of U.S. influence in the SCS. This option increases the likelihood of Malaysia not pursuing the strengthening of a security partnership with the United States because the United States appears to be an unreliable partner. This option is likely to decrease U.S. influence with Vietnam, Malaysia, and Philippines. Although most likely true with all options, China's growing military capability will also increase as a threat to U.S. access in the SCS. If China does not change its policy in the SCS, China may continue to appear like the aggressor in the territorial disputes, which may result in the strengthening of resolve for the claimant, especially when that claimant is Vietnam.

#### Option Two (Maintain Current Security Partnership)

In this option, the United States maintains the current security partnership status with Vietnam. The United States may choose this option because it is on track to meet its objectives in the SCS and no advancement of security partnership with Vietnam is necessary. In this option, the United States would continue to supply Vietnam with a small amount of defense aid, provide nonlethal military sales, conduct periodic port visits, and conduct annual combined training with Vietnam on humanitarian assistance.

This research indicates that this option will not attain U.S. objectives in the SCS. Currently, China continues unabated with its land reclamation programs and provocative actions towards other claimants in the SCS. China still refuses to negotiate collectively with the other claimants or adhere to international order concerning conduct and laws of the sea. China's Salami Slicing strategy has thus far worked and China controls a larger portion of the SCS than before. No evidence suggests that the current US-VN security

partnership is preventing China from the eventual control of its 9 dash line, which would result in U.S. freedom of navigation at risk and give China the ability to control the SLOC in the SCS.

This research suggests that the US-CN relationship would be unaffected by the United States continuing its current security partnership with Vietnam. Currently, China is advancing its relationship with Russia based on energy needs despite the Russians supplying submarines to Vietnam. China needs U.S. markets for export as much or more than China needs Russian energy. This suggests that the current US-VN security partnership, which is similar or to a lesser extent than Vietnam's security partnership with Russia, does not harm US-CN relations. This option has little effect on the US-PH alliance, nor is there evidence that suggest the U.S. current security partnership efforts with Vietnam has prevented the development of a strategic partnership with Malaysia.

With this option, U.S. influence in the region will likely continue to diminish in the SCS due to the China's rise in relative influence. Vietnam will be able to realize the opportunity to train and develop doctrine for humanitarian assistance missions, but this option will not help Vietnam attain its objectives in the territorial disputes with China. This option has little effect on the appearance of China as the aggressor nation, and the accusations that the United States is making the situation tenser in the SCS will continue.

#### Option Three (Advancement of the US-VN Security Partnership)

In this option, the United States advances its security partnership with Vietnam because it cannot currently meet its objectives in the SCS. There are many resources available that the United States could use to advance its security partnership with

Vietnam. The United States could increase its military aid to Vietnam and direct that aid towards Vietnamese military capabilities that best support U.S. objectives in the SCS. Training activities between the two nations have thus far been primarily maritime and nonlethal, such as humanitarian assistance and disaster response. If the US-VN security partnership expanded, these combined training events could include ground, air, and maritime exercises that are relevant to the security environment in the SCS. Military sales could include lethal military equipment and advanced naval and air platforms. Currently, the United States has secured access agreements for bases in the Asia-Pacific, notably in the Philippines and Australia. These agreements allow the United States to rotate forces and conduct combined training throughout the region. Basing, if expanded to Vietnam, provides the United States with maritime, air, and land force access options along Vietnam's coastline and in close proximity to the SLOC that runs through the SCS. Finally, the United States could help Vietnam develop training and doctrine for operations in the SCS. All these activities would advance the US-VN security partnership from what currently exists.

This research suggests that this option would likely lead to the continued freedom of navigation and open SLOCs in the SCS. In some instances, China does not adhere to international law in the SCS, therefore, sovereignty is only recognized by what is controlled and occupied in the SCS. The Philippines did not occupy the Scarborough Shoal and that resulted in China gaining control of that land feature in aftermath of the 2012 dispute. If the U.S. security partnership with Vietnam made China's provocations towards Vietnam too costly for China, then China may change its current practice of slowly seizing territory from other claimants in the SCS, or at least from Vietnam.

Vietnam occupies the preponderance of land features in the Spratly Islands and a US-VN security partnership could help Vietnam maintain and strengthen its occupation. A change in China's SCS policy, along with a strengthening of Vietnam's Spratly Islands occupation, is likely to result in the continuance of the current state (status quo) in the dispute in which United States is able to navigate freely and the SCS SLOC is open. This option would harm US-CN relations and affect other areas of US-CN cooperation. Similar to China's reaction to U.S. military sales to Taiwan, China may temporarily cut off military-to-military engagements and not participate in U.S. led diplomatic initiatives. The U.S. military will have increased its presence in the SCS that will increase the risk of strategic miscalculations, which may result in worse relations between the United States and China. This option may harm US-PH relations because the Philippines could perceive the United States as favoring its security partnership with Vietnam over the alliance or the United States could appear to favor Vietnam's claims over the Philippines' claims. Alternatively, this option may also improve US-PH relations by showing U.S. resolve towards security in the SCS.

Based on the analysis, this option has both opportunities and threats. U.S. expanded military sales would provide Vietnam with opportunities for training, doctrine, and maintenance from the United States. Vietnam provides the United States an opportunity to increase its basing options in the SCS region and therefore increasing U.S. influence. An increased US-VN security partnership would be threatening to China and may motivate China to increase its military spending, which is likely to improve China's A2/AD capabilities and further close the technology gap between US-CN. The Vietnamese will likely face an increased threat of conflict with China since both nations

will be operating more militarily in the SCS and China will perceive Vietnam as more of a threat and therefore more aggressive toward Vietnam. China may feel compelled to respond more forcefully based on the need for China to appear strong internally. This option is also threatened by Vietnam's human rights record. Any training exercises with Vietnamese units would require Leahy vetting, and some Vietnamese units may not be able to conduct combined exercises after the vetting process. This option offers the most flexibility in terms of reaction to China's actions.

#### Option Four (US-VN Alliance and Basing)

With this option, the U.S. Congress ratifies a Mutual Defense Treaty with Vietnam and the U.S. military establishes permanent naval, air, or ground bases in Vietnam. The United States may choose this option because access to the SLOC in the SCS is greatly threatened, which results in risk to U.S. economic security. A viable permanent basing solution in Vietnam is Cam Rahn Bay, but the United States may also have access to the numerous other bases, notably air bases, scattered throughout Vietnam. An alliance with Vietnam would deter military actions against Vietnam in the SCS and may help contain the expanding power and influence of China in the SCS region, although it also could polarize the region.

This option will not guarantee attainment of U.S. objectives, but will allow for a continuous military presence in close proximity to the SLOC and the United States will likely retain continuous freedom of navigation in the SCS outside of armed conflict with China. An alliance with Vietnam would greatly harm diplomatic relations with China, and it is likely that all military-to-military cooperation would cease. China would likely seek ways to influence the United States toward removing military forces from Vietnam

and revoking the US-VN Mutual Defense Treaty or making it costly. China would also test the resolve of the US-VN alliance in an attempt to show U.S lack of commitment. Tensions would be high between US-CN and it is likely that both nations' economies would suffer. A US-VN Mutual Defense Treaty would cause other Asian allies and partners to reevaluate its relationship with the United States and weigh that evaluation against the importance of its relationship with China. It would also increase pressure on other nations in the region to choose a good relationship with either the United States or China. Another possibility is that the US-VN alliance would embolden Vietnam and therefore increase the probability of an incident escalating.

The US-VN security partnership would provide multiple opportunities for Vietnam to improve its military capabilities through combined exercises. It would also give the United States long-term access to bases in Vietnam. China is very likely to increase its military spending and capabilities and perceive the United States and Vietnam as a direct threat. An alliance may compel the Chinese to be more aggressive towards the United States and Vietnam based on immense domestic pressure to appear strong. In order for the U.S. Congress to ratify a US-VN Mutual Defense Treaty, the Leahy law may need amending for this option to be feasible.

Table 6. U.S.-VN Security Partnership Options Comparison

US-VN Security Partnership Options Comparison				
	<b>Option 1</b> (Decrease US-VN Security Partnership)	<b>Option 2</b> (Maintain Current Security Partnership)	<b>Option 3</b> (Advancement of US-VN Security Partnership)	<b>Option 4</b> (Alliance & Basing)
<b>Option Description</b>	Forgo future naval visits, End military sales, downgrade classification of partnership, end combined training	Continue defense aid, provide non-lethal military sales, periodic port visits, annual combined training on humanitarian assistance missions	Increased and directed military aid, regular unified action combined training, military sales of lethal military equipment, access agreement, training and doctrine development	A mutual defense treaty, U.S basing in Vietnam, regular unified action combined training, military sales of lethal military equipment
<b>Criteria 1:</b> Freedom of Navigation & Open SLOCs	Much Less Favorable Outcome	Less Favorable Outcome	More Favorable Outcome	More Favorable Outcome
<b>Criteria 2:</b> US-CN Relations	More Favorable Outcome	No effect	Less Favorable Outcome	Significantly Less Favorable Outcome
<b>Criteria 3:</b> US-Allies/Partners Relations	Less Favorable	No effect	More Favorable Outcome	More Favorable Outcome
<b>Criteria 4:</b> Opportunities	China Appears more as the aggressor		US-VN Training, U.S. Basing	US-VN Training, U.S. Basing,
<b>Criteria 5:</b> Threats	Likely Diminished Influence, Likely improved Chinese A2/AD Capability	Probable Diminished Influence, Likely improved Chinese A2/AD Capability	Likely improved Chinese A2/AD Capability, Possibly more aggressive China, Leahy Vetting threatens feasibility of option	Probable improved Chinese A2/AD Capability, Likely more aggressive China

Source: Created by author.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

This research recommends Option Three (Advancement of the US-VN Security Partnership). Currently, China could not deny the U.S. access to the SCS and the United States would most likely defeat China in armed conflict. The analysis shows that the United States does not need Vietnam's forces or its bases to defeat China militarily. In the event of a large-scale conflict with China in the SCS, the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement with the Philippines would provide the bases that the air, naval, and ground force need to meet its objectives, assuming that the United States would not need to move ground forces into mainland China. The ability to defeat China militarily is not the issue.

In almost all situations, large-scale armed conflict with China would be inexcusably costly and reestablishing freedom of navigation in the SCS would not be worth the cost. The United States must ensure that China does not dominate the SCS, and therefore have the ability to deny freedom of navigation during its shaping operations in the region. At the same time, the United States should not significantly harm its relationship with China in obtaining its objectives in the SCS. Given the U.S. position on the territorial disputes in the SCS, the United States must allow for time to solve the disputes peacefully, legitimately, and without provoking conflict. In order to balance these objectives, the United States must carefully manage its security relationships in the region. Currently, the only true sovereignty in the SCS is what is occupied. China, thus far, has retained the initiative in the SCS. None of the measures taken by the United States, any of the claimants, or the international community has prevented China from



slowly controlling an ever-greater portion of the SCS, and China shows no indication of changing its behavior in the SCS.

The United States must develop a solution that compels China to change its behavior in the SCS. The only island chain in the SCS not completely controlled by China is the Spratly Islands. Vietnam controls the preponderance of islands in this chain and has the most capable military force in Southeast Asia. If Vietnam loses the Spratly Islands, then China will likely control its 9 dash line in the SCS, and therefore have the ability to deny U.S. access to SCS. The Philippines is too weak and unstable, Brunei is too small, and Malaysia values stability over access. Enabling Vietnam to deter Chinese aggression and prevent domination of the SCS would be the most effective and expedient option for the United States.

An advancement of the US-VN security partnership should support Vietnam's occupation and control over land features in the Spratly Island, as it exists today, and strengthen Vietnam's military capabilities to defend its occupied land features, therefore, making it too costly for China to gain control through coercive measures. To do this, the United States should increase military aid to support Vietnam's own reclamation and base building in the Spratly Islands. Second, the United States should train and equip Vietnam's Naval Infantry to bolster Vietnam's island defense capability. Finally, the United States should help develop Vietnam's naval and air capabilities to protect its SLOCs between mainland Vietnam and the Spratly Islands, even if this meant providing lethal military sales. Any basing agreement should be for access agreements and not for permanent occupation. Military-to-military exchanges should be for directly increasing Vietnamese military capability and enable them to protect its interests in the SCS. Option

Three would give the United States more flexibility in the SCS. A security partnership with Vietnam allows the United States options to quickly escalate force or provide more deterrence to deescalate tensions in the region. To advance its diplomatic efforts, the United States should ratify the UNCLOS. That United States desires a peaceful resolution to the SCS disputes according to international law, but appears hypocritical by not ratifying the UNCLOS itself.

Both the United States and China desire good relations with each other. Chinese-Russian relations have advanced even though Russia has supplied Vietnam with advanced submarines and anti-ship cruise missiles. China will maintain the initiative in the SCS until presented with an unacceptable cost. The United States could enable Vietnam to retain control of the Spratly Islands. As long as Vietnam controls some portion of the SCS, China will not dominate the SCS. A Mutual Defense Treaty or permanent basing agreement with Vietnam is not recommended because the risk is too great to US-CN relations.

#### Recommendation for Future Research

The SCS is an immense and fascinating subject and this research could have examined many different aspects of the SCS dispute. This research looked at the US-VN security partnership from the U.S. perspective. Future research could examine if a US-VN security partnership helps attain Vietnam's objectives in the SCS and if Vietnam should seek to advance the relationship. In the 2015 NSS, Malaysia was a target for the United States as an expanded security partnership in the region. Examining the feasibility, acceptability, and suitability of a U.S.-Malaysia security partnership would be valuable research. The focus in this paper was on the diplomatic and military elements of

national power. The economic and informational aspects would provide more breadth to the options available for a US-VN security partnership. A study on possible actions the United States could take to curb China's aggression in the SCS would be a viable and useful study. Finally, a study on a U.S. whole-of-government approach toward the relationship with Vietnam would add to the discussion as well.

## GLOSSARY

**Air Defense Identification Zone.** Airspace of defined dimensions within which the ready identification, location, and control of airborne vehicles are required.

**Contiguous Zones.** Sea zones that extend twenty-four nautical miles from the baseline of a country and a state has the right to enforce customs, fiscal, immigration, and sanitation laws in its contiguous zone.<sup>193</sup>

**Continental Shelf.** The seabed and subsoil of the submarine areas that extend beyond its territorial sea throughout the natural prolongation of its land territory to the outer edge of the continental margin, or to a distance of 200 nautical miles from the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial sea is measured where the outer edge of the continental margin does not extend up to that distance.”<sup>194</sup>

**East Asia.** A region that contains Northeast & Southeast Asia. Northeast Asia refers to the countries of North and South Korea, Japan, and China. Southeast Asia refers to the countries of Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos.

**Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ).** “An area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea, subject to the specific legal regime established in the UNCLOS, under which the rights and jurisdiction of the coastal states and the rights and freedoms of other states are governed by the relevant provisions of this Convention.”<sup>195</sup> The EEZ extends out to 200 nautical miles from the baseline of a state. In a state’s EEZ it may exclusively utilize the economic resource and construct artificial structures for the purpose of obtaining resources. All states have the right to “navigation and overflight and of the laying of submarine cables and pipelines, and other internationally lawful uses of the sea related to these freedoms, such as those associated with the operation of ships, aircraft and submarine cables and pipelines, and compatible with the other provisions of this Convention.”<sup>196</sup>

**High Seas.** The areas on and above the waters that are not part of any state’s territorial waters, contiguous zone, or EEZ. The UNCLOS outlines high seas in part seven. In the high seas, all states are allowed freedoms of the high seas and rights to navigation. Part seven of the UNCLOS also describes how no state can claim as territory the high seas and the universal conduct and responsibilities on the high

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<sup>193</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas*, 35.

<sup>194</sup> Ibid.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 44.

seas. States can freely navigate on the high seas, including navies and warships. States are also free to fish and conduct scientific research in the high seas.<sup>197</sup>

Innovation Index. The Global Innovation Index includes two sub-indices: the Innovation Input Sub-Index and the Innovation Output Sub-Index. The first sub-index is based on five pillars: Institutions, Human Capital and Research, Infrastructure, Market Sophistication, and Business sophistication. The second sub-index is based on two pillars: knowledge and technology outputs and creative outputs. Each pillar is divided into sub-pillars and each sub-pillar is composed of individual indicators.<sup>198</sup>

Littoral States of the SCS. The nations that have a shoreline to the SCS, which are China, Taiwan, The Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Normal Baseline. The low water line, for measuring the breadth of the territorial sea, along the coast as marked on large-scale charts officially recognized by the coastal states.<sup>199</sup>

Partner Nation. A nation that the United States works with in a specific situation or operation.<sup>200</sup>

Security Cooperation. All Department of Defense interactions with foreign defense establishments to build defense relationships that promote specific U.S. security objectives, develop allied and friendly military capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, and provide U.S. forces with peacetime and contingency access to a host nation.<sup>201</sup>

Semi-enclosed Sea. A gulf, basin, or sea surrounded by two or more states and connected to another sea or ocean by a narrow outlet or consisting entirely or primarily of the territorial seas and EEZ of two or more coastal states.<sup>202</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> All information contained in this paragraph comes from Articles in United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas*.

<sup>198</sup> TheGlobalEconomy.com, “Rankings, GDP per Capita, PPP,” accessed April 12, 2015, [http://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/GDP\\_per\\_capita\\_PPP](http://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/GDP_per_capita_PPP).

<sup>199</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas*, 27.

<sup>200</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 1-02, 187.

<sup>201</sup> *Ibid.*, 219.

<sup>202</sup> United Nations, *United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas*, 67.

South China Sea. The South China Sea is the body of water that is between the countries of Taiwan, Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, Brunei, Singapore, Vietnam and China.

Strategic Estimate. The strategic estimate is an analytical tool available to Combatant Commanders prior to the development of theater strategies or the design of global campaign plans, theater campaign plans, or theater strategy. Combatant Commanders use continuous strategic estimates to facilitate the employment of military forces across the range of military operations. The strategic estimate is more comprehensive in scope than the estimates of subordinate commanders as it encompasses all aspects of the Combatant Commander's operational environment, and it is the basis for the development of the Geographic Combatant Commander's theater strategy.<sup>203</sup>

Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis. A SWOT analysis is a common way to analyze strategy during formulation. A SWOT analysis is defined in Joint Doctrine Publication 5-00, *Campaign Planning* used by the Joint Force of the United Kingdom. SWOT is described as a way to identify internal strengths and weaknesses, recognize external opportunities and threats for a particular entity, and thus understand the balance between protecting strengths, mitigating weaknesses, exploiting opportunities, and minimizing threats.<sup>204</sup>

Territorial Seas. Sea that extend twelve nautical miles from the baseline of a country. A country has the same rights to sovereignty of its territorial seas as it would over the land area. An exception is that other nations are allowed innocent passage through territorial seas.

U.S. Allies. The U.S. allies in the Asian-Pacific are Japan, South Korea, Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand.<sup>205</sup>

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<sup>203</sup> Joint Chiefs of Staff, Joint Publication 5-0, B-1.

<sup>204</sup> United Kingdom, Joint Doctrine Publication 5-00, 1-8.

<sup>205</sup> U.S. President, *National Security Strategy*, 2010, 42.

APPENDIX A

INCIDENTS IN THE SCS

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event<sup>206</sup></b>	<b>Implications</b>
1946	The Republic of China (Taiwan) first occupied Itu Aba in the Spratly Islands (later places permanent garrison on the island in 1956).	Still represents Taiwan's only occupied island in the Spratly Islands.
1947	The Republic of China (Taiwan) published its 11-dashed line map.	Provided the basis of the PRC's claim in the SCS.
Dec 1970	The Philippines occupies five islands in the western Spratly Islands.	Establishes Philippines' claim to the Spratly Islands.
Jan 1974	South Vietnam occupies six islands in the Spratly Islands and establishes the Spratly Islands as a province.	Established Vietnam's modern claim to the Spratly Islands.
Jan 1974	The Battle of the Paracels: China seizes the Paracel Island from South Vietnam by force.	China has controls the entire Parcel Island chain. A fact that exist today.
1982	The UNCLOS is established.	
Aug 1983	Malaysia occupies three islands in the Spratly Islands.	Establishes Malaysia claim to the Spratly Islands.
Oct 1983	Malaysia occupies two additional Spratly Islands.	
Jun 1986	China occupies Fiery Cross Reef in the western portion of the Spratly Islands.	The PRC begins to establish its control of the Spratly Island Chain.
Mar 1988	The Johnson Reef Skirmish: China and Vietnam fight over the Johnson Reef in the Spratly Islands. 74 Vietnamese Sailors died when a transport ship sunk.	China expanded its control over the Spratly Islands.
Mar 1992	CN-VN forces clash near Da Lac Reef.	

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<sup>206</sup> Center for a New American Security, "Timeline: 1955-Present," accessed May 15, 2015, <http://www.cnas.org/flashpoints/timeline>.

Jun 1992	China seizes Vietnamese Cargo ship heading out of Hong Kong.	
Jul 1992	China erects landmark on Da Lac Reef.	
Jul 1994	CN-VN have a naval confrontation off the coast of Vietnam over an oil rig site.	
Dec 1994	China occupies Mischief Reef in the Spratly Islands.	China expanded its control over the Spratly Islands.
Mar 1995	Malaysia fires on a Chinese trawler in Malaysia EEZ.	
Mar 1995	The Philippines' military removes the Chinese from Mischief Reef and destroys Chinese built structures.	
Mar 1995	Taiwan fires artillery towards Vietnamese freighter near Itu Aba in the Spratly Islands.	
Apr 1997	Both China and Philippines place flags and erect markers on the Scarborough Shoal.	
Jan 1998	The Philippines' Navy detain Chinese fisherman near Scarborough Shoal.	
Jan 1999	Vietnam fires upon a Philippines fishing boat.	One Filipino fisherman was injured.
May 1999	China harasses a grounded Philippines vessel in the Spratly Islands.	
Jun 1999	Chinese fishing boat sinks after colliding with a Philippines' naval vessel.	
Oct 1999	Vietnam fires upon a Philippines aircraft near the Spratly Islands.	
May 2000	Philippines troops fire upon a Chinese Fishing boat.	One Chinese Fisherman was killed, seven were detained.
Jan 2001	The Philippines Navy boards 14 Chinese vessels in the Spratly Islands.	
Apr 2001	A Chinese fighter collides with a U.S. Navy intelligence aircraft.	One Chinese pilot is killed, U.S. pilots are detained.
Aug 2001	Vietnam fires upon Philippines aircraft over the Spratly Islands.	
Jul 2008	China warns the U.S. company, Exxon Mobile, to terminate oil deal with Vietnam, claiming it violated Chinese sovereignty.	
Mar 2009	The operations of the USNS <i>Victorious</i> is disrupted by Chinese fishing boats.	
Mar 2009	The USNS <i>Impeccable</i> is harassed by five Chinese vessels 75 miles south of Hainan Island.	



Jun 2009	The Chinese submarine collides with the USS <i>John S. McCain</i> .	
Feb 2011	A Chinese frigate fires warning shot at a Philippines vessel.	
May 2011	Twice, a Vietnamese exploration cable is cut by a Chinese vessel.	
Jul 2011	China detains Vietnamese fisherman and remove them from Paracel Islands.	
Oct 2011	A Philippines Naval vessel rams a Chinese fishing boat.	
Feb 2012	China uses force to prevent Vietnamese fishing vessels from landing at the Paracel Islands during a storm.	
Mar 2012	China detains 21 Vietnamese fisherman near the Paracel Islands.	
Apr 2012	The Philippines and Chinese Navy stand-off near Scarborough Shoal and the Philippines withdrawals in response to US mediation efforts.	China effectively gained control of the Scarborough Shoal.
Nov 2012	China severs a Vietnamese seismic surveillance cable.	
Jan 2013	The Philippines requests arbitration from the UNCLOS on China's territorial claim.	
May 2013	China sends a maritime enforcement ships to the waters near Second Thomas Shoal in the Spratly Islands where the Philippine military are stationed aboard a grounded former US tank-landing ship.	
Dec 2013	An Amphibious Dock Ship of the Chinese Liaoning Carrier Group maneuvered and stopped within 500 meter in the path of the USS <i>Cowpens</i> forcing evasive action. Incident occurred 32 nautical miles south of Hainan Island.	
May 2014	Vietnam and Chinese naval forces clash over a Chinese Oil rig moved within Vietnam's EEZ.	Chinese factor workers are killed by Vietnamese protesters.
Aug 2014	China harasses a U.S. aircraft.	
May 2015	U.S. official express concern of the Chinese land reclamation program on mischief reef.	

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